SEAMS OF LEARNING: EXPLORING CHILDREN'S ROLES AS CO-CREATORS OF CURRICULUM

By

Sherrill Brown

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING 1999

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-39509-X

Canada

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Library Release Form

NAME OF AUTHOR: **Sherrill Brown**

TITLE OF THESIS: **Seams of Learning: Exploring Children's Roles as Co-Creators of Curriculum**

DEGREE: **Doctor of Philosophy**

YEAR THIS DEGREE WAS GRANTED: 1999

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Sherrill Brown

Sherrill Brown
Site 7 Box 4 R.R.1
Leduc, Alberta T9E 2X1

Dec. 23/98

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Seams of Learning: Exploring Children's Roles as Co-creators of Curriculum* submitted by Sherrill Brown in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Janis Blakey

Dr. Lorene Everett-Turner

Dr. Julia Ellis

Dr. Joyce Bainbridge

Dr. Margaret Iveson

Dr. Peggy Wilson

Dr. Ted Aoki

Date Nov. 30, 1998

ABSTRACT

In 1993, as I finished my master's study, which explored the link between play and literacy in early childhood, I was left with a feeling of unfinished business. Given my conviction that children construct their own learning, it seemed to me that they must also be co-creators of classroom curriculum. If curriculum is indeed what happens in the daily rhythm of the classroom life, then what is the experience like for children as they contribute to the shaping of their own learning?

In this study, the role of children as co-creators is examined using an interpretative framework. Participant observation (Spradley, 1980) techniques which include extensive field notes and some video and audio taping are the primary modes of capturing the essence of classroom life. Interpretation of the observations and subsequent reflection form the analysis process. I identify adult conceptions of childhood, conceptions of curriculum, and conceptions of play as the three strands of the conceptual framework and use these as lenses for interpreting the observations in classrooms in each of the four sites: kindergarten; day care; grade one; and grade two. Detailed field notes allow the participants to "speak" to the reader. Descriptions of children's play express the inner view, not available to us in any other form, but critical to our understanding of children's interpretations of the world in which they live. A mining metaphor is used to interlace my history and motivation with my sense of what is happening deep within the seams of classroom life for both children and adults as they co-create curriculum.

The descriptions of the play episodes, and those of classroom life in which play does not figure as largely, illustrate what it is like for children as they create opportunities

for making connections to curriculum. Play seems to be the base upon which children build their own connections. Sometimes play and learning is supported and facilitated by adults, but not always. Considerations of time and space for play, and relationships in play, also seem to be important in the discussion.

As I think about the roles of the co-creators in this study, it seems difficult to ignore the multifaceted component of responsibility for the act of creation. The relationships, including those of power and reciprocity also seem to be of vital importance. The implications arising from these discussions lead to a contemplation of the politics of curriculum in our society as it affects us locally and from a distance. And above all else, the generosity of teachers and children as they share a classroom life should fill us with hope for the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the committee members for their guidance and support. The commitment they demonstrated in reading, reflecting and providing me with thoughtful questions to answer and new ideas to ponder inspires me. I would like to thank Dr. Julia Ellis, Dr. Peggy Wilson, Dr. Joyce Bainbridge, and Dr. Margaret Iveson for the generosity of their time and the spirit of their discussion, not only during the oral but throughout my graduate learning journey. I would like to thank Dr. Iveson for being with me during both my master's and doctoral studies. It has meant much to me. I thank Dr. Ted Aoki for being willing to be the external examiner for my study (a great thrill for me!) and for his wonderful thought provoking questions.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Dr. Janis Blakey and Dr. Lorene Everett-Turner for their mentorship not only during my graduate studies but also throughout my teaching-learning career. Their careful editing, questioning, probing, and nurturing supportive ways of being with students have shown me how important relationship and presence is for learning. There are not sufficient words to express my thanks for all they have done.

My children, Chris and Robyn and my mother, Eileen, and indeed all of my family have supported and encouraged me. Without their help, this study would not have become a reality for me and indeed their efforts often took many forms (thanks Robyn for being my computer technician).

My husband, my partner, my friend, Bob has been my constant support and my vigilant taskmaster and this thesis is as much his as it is mine. Without his love and encouragement, it would not have been accomplished.

And lastly, I thank my father, who, even though, he is no longer with me physically, has guided my mining expedition and is always with me as I descend deeper into the seams of life to learn and grow.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE
The Continuing Story 1

CHAPTER ONE
Staking a Claim: Thinking About and Coming to the Question 4

What Is the Origin of this Research? 4
The Constructivist Paradigm 5
Adrian's Story 6
Orienting to the Question 9
Turning the Questions Inside Out! 11
The Mining Metaphor 13

CHAPTER TWO
Visualizing the Seams: A Conceptual Framework 17

Adult Conceptions of Childhood 18
Conceptions of Curriculum 22
Teachers' Views of Curriculum 24
Conceptions of Play 31

CHAPTER THREE
Preparing To Go Down in the Seams: The Methodology 38

An Interpretative Framework 38
Gathering the Tools and Finding the Sites 40
Choosing the Sites 43
The Tools 44
The Process 46

CHAPTER FOUR
Entering the Tunnels: The Research Sites 48

Kindergarten 49
Day Care 52
Elementary School 58
Grade One 59
Grade Two 62

CHAPTER FIVE
Mining for the Gold: Play 67

Looking in the Seams 69
Kindergarten 69
Toddlers 73
Preschoolers 76
Grade One 78
Grade Two 84

CHAPTER SIX
Chipping Away at the Ore: Play 89

A Time and Space for Play 89
Who Owns Time? 90
Playing in the Seams 92
Creating Space and Time to Play 95
Time and Space 96
Choices 103
Finding the End of this Seam 109

CHAPTER SEVEN
Hauling the Ore Up and Out: Curriculum 111

Relationships 113
Discoveries 121
The Co-Creator Experience 128
Mismatched Agendas 132

CHAPTER EIGHT
Taking the Gold to the Smelter: Adult-Child Relationships 138

Daycare 142
Grade Two 148
Grade One 153

EPILOGUE
Thoughts of Gold 159

Responsibility 160
Reciprocity 163

The Politics of Curriculum 165
Celebrating 167

REFERENCES 171

Prologue

The Continuing Story

This research isn't a new story. It is the continuation of my journey from kindergarten teacher to graduate student. I began my master's study by looking at children making literacy connections in their play. I ended that study by posing more questions for myself about the nature of classroom curriculum and the roles children take on within the classroom dynamic.

> As a researcher, my definitions of curriculum have changed and I must look again at past teaching experience to come to an understanding of how I define curriculum.
>
> > Even language experience or arts curricula that seem to invite the fantasies and memories of students challenge the teacher to come to terms with her own versions of the truth and with the designations she reserves for those accounts that contradict the current wisdom. (Grumet, 1988, p.168)
>
> The children and the narratives they tell lead me to new assumptions about the nature of a living curriculum and the relationships required for its sustenance. (Brown, 1993, p.115)

I am now astonished that I would have blithely dropped these statements into a master's thesis without realizing the impact they would have on me as a researcher. I began to think about these statements, particularly "living curriculum" and to recognize how true they were for me. It seemed that I deposited a lot of the ethereal notions I had been holding about children and schools into this Master's thesis. Witness the following statements made about the nature of the teaching/learning relationship which have provoked me, teased me and sent me into the doctoral program when I had no intention of doing so.

> The common definition shared by "teach" and "learn" confirms my suspicion that teacher and learner provide both teaching and learning services for each other. Learning is a dyadic function shared by the participants in the relationship. Merleau Ponty (1960) advises us that we cannot escape the body-subject as we learn. Nor can we escape each other as we learn. Just as we must know that we bring all of our body and mind together in one package to the learning, so do we bring all of our own entity into the larger system composed of other entities. We do not escape each other and it is that dyadic teacher/learner relationship which creates the tension we bring to the process of informing curriculum. (Brown, 1993, p.116)

When I wrote that in 1993, I was only just beginning to think about the relationships which would eventually lead me to the heart of this study. I was aware that although

some of my questions had been dealt with, new ones were popping up all over the place. I think I've got it figured out now -- there are always new questions! I remembered the quotation from Kenneth Clark as being a nice compact way to end the study, as he said, "I have now reached the frontiers of my subject, given the limited form in which I had conceived it" (1981, p.17). This quotation turned out to be rather prophetic. I think I knew just after I wrote it in the thesis that I would have to continue my re-searching. My frontiers have been stretched and I have attempted to lift the limitations somewhat. Research is a bit scary without some boundaries, so I began to think about how to frame this next leg of the journey. There seemed to be many questions and fragments of thought pulling me to new frontiers. It was difficult to articulate them clearly, other than through metaphor. Perhaps that is why I made this last statement in 1993.

> Research is like a Catherine Wheel, a large explosive cartwheeling firework. The sparks, just as I theorized in my proposal, do continue to fly in all directions, taking me off to new worlds of learning. (Brown, 1993, p.125)

The Catherine Wheel image came to me near the beginning of the master's study one night as I was drifting off to sleep. It seemed to persist as I wrote the proposal and it is still with me now as I finish this leg of the journey. It is the image of flying sparks that is important – the energy out of which new worlds start to form, new ideas, and new ways of seeing old ideas. I invite you to come with me on the sparks that are flying from the Catherine Wheel as I continue my research journey. The stories continue...

Chapter One

Staking a Claim:
Thinking about and coming to the Question

What is the origin of this research?

As I have already stated, this study is a continuing story. I think I began this research long before I came to be a graduate student. I started this search during many years as a classroom teacher. Or perhaps it goes back even further. Since I consider myself an active participant in the research process, I must also consider my early life, who I am now, and how I came to be a researcher and a learner. This means I must consider how my own childhood years are at the root of my present preoccupation. I will discuss these roots a little further on in this chapter. I must also understand how my research focus comes from my continuing development as teacher/learner. In the classroom, I witnessed children making discoveries about the everyday routines of life. The content of what we need to know as learners in a socialized school system, as partners in relationships with other humans, as learners in our own right, and as active participants in constructing understanding is indeed the essence of a successfully developed kindergarten program. The question which sets up my research is focused on what the curriculum generation experience is like for young children as they play and learn together with the adults in their school lives. In other words, what is it like to be a co-creator of curriculum in the classroom? For me, children demonstrate a constructivist approach to learning which I see as the base of this study's questions for research. It is critical to examine the notion of a constructivist perspective as a starting point for this research.

The Constructivist Paradigm

Duckworth (1996) talks of the "having of wonderful ideas" which she considers to be the "essence of intellectual development" (p.13) and which are dependent on opportunity. I conceptualize "the having of wonderful ideas" against a backdrop of children as active learners in the kindergarten classroom, creating understanding for themselves and others, making sense of new experiences and coming to know about the world in which they live. My construction of knowledge as teacher expands, then, to see my teaching experiences as learning experiences in conjunction with children as active partners. If I see them through the lens of a constructivist paradigm, then I must also see them as helping to create classroom learning, and thereby creating curriculum. My view of curriculum expands from the program of studies to include all that happens in the classroom in the daily-lived experience of teachers and children. The root of curriculum comes from currere -- "to run". Thus curriculum can be seen as the running or the happenings of the classroom experience. Perhaps the term co-creator, which I will use extensively throughout this dissertation, is not always applied to curriculum; but, I feel strongly that it is inherent in early childhood educational theory. Piaget's view of children as learners, as explained by DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) includes the premise that children learn many things which we do not specifically teach. The "knower actively constructs knowledge" (p.8). Further, learning about something requires the active assimilation by the learner and the subsequent use of the knowledge in a meaningful way. Recent interpretations of Vygotsky, in relation to the Reggio Emilia approach (Rankin, 1997), discuss the "importance of learning taking place in the social realm and emphasize the active role of adults (and children) in the learning process of others" (p.77). And here,

learning is seen as situated in the social milieu and as dependent on interaction. The term "coconstruction" (p.78), coined by Rankin, is used to enforce the notion that children are partners in the learning process and as such have a role to play in how and what they learn.

Given this theoretical base, in combination with my practical classroom life with children, it is not a large step for me to move from seeing children as active learners to seeing them as co-creators of learning. As children learn about themselves and others and their role in the world, they are co-creators in the development of their curriculum. I watched this emerge as they played with life, about life and through life experiences. I hardly knew myself when it began to become clear that I was a part of all this creativity. I have identified a moment of epiphany when I think it became clearer, but really it must have been there, simmering below the surface. I could not have recognized it otherwise. It began with Adrian and the incident in the restaurant as he took my order for msrm pza.

Adrian's Story

It was a busy day in kindergarten that March day. As a class we had been on many field trips within our community, studying the roles of community members and trying to make sense of the world around us. As a class, we decided to set up play centres in our room so we could explore and play through all we had learned about on our trips. We created a construction zone in the sand table, a swimming pool in the water centre, a vet hospital near the guinea pigs, a beauty salon, a post office, a radio station in the listening centre, a garage and many others, including the restaurant in the house centre. These were all places we had visited and it seemed important to the children to replay what they had seen and heard and learned.

Adrian is working in the restaurant today. He has assumed all the duties necessary for the efficient operation of a pizza parlour. He is cook, waiter and maitre d' all in one. He is a very busy fellow, for today a lot of customers have wanted pizza to go. One last customer is at the door, waiting to be seated. Fortunately, there is a table near the kitchen. Adrian hands the customer a menu listing various pizza choices and indicates the signs on the walls showing the finished product. He stands patiently while the customer peruses the menu and he answers her many questions about the products. He offers the customer a choice of beverage and waits until she finally decides on milk. He hastily scribbles on his order pad. At last she orders the number 3 pizza on the menu and he writes hurriedly before he scampers off to the kitchen. Soon he is back with her drink and the cutlery she will need. This has certainly been a busy day but he has taken care of everything in his usual calm, efficient manner. The pizza is ready and he serves it with a flourish. The customer enjoys her meal and looks around with interest at the walls on which the pictures and signs are displayed telling customers about restaurant fare and prices. A telephone book is hanging by the phone, half open and ready for use, in case Adrian has to call the grocery

> supplier again. The mailbox with the pizza parlour's address etched on it sits just inside the door. Newspapers lay on the chair where customers wait for their take out orders. The customer swallows the last bite and indicates to Adrian that she is ready for her bill, which he carefully puts on the table. She looks at it and reads "msrm pza" and "mlk" and pays the amount Adrian has verbally indicated. Then she leaves the restaurant and Adrian is at last free to relax after such a busy day. (Brown, 1993, p.1-2)

The excerpt from my masters' study details the experience with Adrian in the restaurant centre. It was an important moment for me but I suspect Adrian saw nothing unusual about his activity that day. I made some connections and I regard this as the spark that started me down the road to a master's degree. There was something here that Adrian was showing me. When I think back to it now, I see that this is the moment that I began to see that the children in the class made me a learner in a very concrete and conscious manner. I didn't instruct Adrian in how to write what he did. He found a way to represent his thinking and contributed to his own curriculum and ...mine!

I began to realize that Adrian might be taking responsibility for his own learning as he attempted to create a symbol system based on his understanding of the oral components of language in our society. He was also recreating a role in society, which he recognized, and he was playing with it to deepen his understanding. And lastly he was engaged with me in a social demonstration of his understanding, for it seems to me that learning is shared with others. Perhaps we need validation, or a partner, an other to reflect

back the dimensions of understanding that are possible, as we move forward toward further exploration and creation. Adrian was creating his own learning by pulling ideas and concepts from the larger society, and playing with them. As a moment of epiphany it was blinding, and even though I didn't fully understand it, the experience propelled me into a master's degree with a focus on the importance of literacy and play. I came into the master's program, ready to construct and be engaged in my own learning. I had a clear focus. I was going to address the issue of how literacy and play were connected, how play supported literacy development. I did not expect what would happen next.

As I plunged deeper into gathering research in the kindergarten program, I realized that there was more I needed to discover. I had many questions about what was really happening in play, and about the connection of play to curriculum. The percolation process certainly helped me to focus and, during a summer course with Madeline Grumet, stimulated me to consider more than just the literacy and play combination. I realized I needed to explore how curriculum comes about in relation to the classroom dynamic. When I completed the master's degree, I was not satisfied and knew I would be continuing on into a doctoral program.

Orienting to the question

I know I could continue to write and rewrite this document several times, because it has become my curriculum and there are always new questions surfacing as I read over the field notes and think about the experience. In keeping with my developing sense of curriculum, it is in the dynamic process that the understanding emerges. A dynamic process by its very nature is always open to new contextualization, new learnings, and the

reworking of old ideas into ever-changing interpretation and patterns. However, there is a starting point which serves as the platform. I started with a question for research which I have alluded to already, but I'd like to re-present it here. I am convinced that as children engage in play and the construction of their own learning, they are also engaged in developing and sustaining a curriculum.

What is the experience of curriculum generation like for young children? What is it they are doing as they play and create curriculum?

The question I finally selected for my focus is open ended. In writing this document I have faced many challenges connected to trying to present information which addresses the question in a way that does not simply lead the reader to assume that I am merely trying to prove my point. The problem for me is that I came into the study with a strong belief about curriculum already inherent in my question. As I have detailed previously, I do start from a position that is consistent with a constructivist paradigm. I believe that children are co-creators of curriculum. Thus my question is not structured to find this particular truth, but rather to try and describe a process that I think is inherent in a classroom life with children. I am struggling to provide a sense of something new when it has been with me for so long that it feels like my skin. And even though it has been with me for so long, I am still making new discoveries about this question. Life long learning for me is embodied in this question. Does it follow then, that for me personally, to question is to learn?

Turning the Questions Inside Out!

What is the experience of curriculum generation like for young children? What is it they are doing as they play and create curriculum?

I could not locate these questions in this chapter without first providing some rationale for choosing them. My questions exist in such a manner because of my previous experiences and my understanding of teaching and learning in the classroom. Thus the constructivist paradigm and my relationship to this perspective are a necessary aspect of the research questions I have formulated.

Do these questions still hold strong even after I have played with and thought about them as I researched and gathered the stories? What do the questions mean to me? What are the pieces?

Implied in these questions are the following embedded queries:

- How does play support the generation of curriculum in different classroom contexts?
- How does context affect the role children play in creating curriculum?
- What role does the adult play?
- How do teachers respond to the potential of children's play?

As I started the research I was aware that the questions might be changed by the gathering of the research stories. I was open to the possibility that "posing a question implies openness but also limitation" (Gadamer, 1994, p.363). I was prepared to reframe my questions to avoid "false suppositions" (p.364), aware that I could be led into a false sense of security about my interpretations. In retrospect, as I consider these questions again, I have a sense that the questions themselves were indeed open enough to allow discussion and thought. What may have changed is the value I have assigned to them.

I selected four sites for research because I felt it was imperative to understand what was happening at different points of a child's learning journey. A description and rationale for these sites follows in subsequent chapters. It is sufficient here to say that they cover the range of early childhood experience possible for young children in Alberta. As I thought about each of the four selected research sites or contexts, I began to realize that the questions had more or less importance for each site, based on the circumstances surrounding the relationships and situations of the participants. I quickly learned that what seemed appropriate for one group was not as critical for another group. This led me to believe that perhaps the contexts of each site influence my interpretations of the questions, as I develop new understandings about individuals' experiences. Thus, interpretation of the original questions (which do still seem appropriate) must become specific to each research site and each group of participants. The questions were viewed and interpreted specific to individual participants. In short, there were slight changes to the questions as I considered each of my four groups. How could it be otherwise, since learning is such a unique experience for each of us? As I provide the stories which support the descriptions of the experiences of co-creation of curriculum through play, I will explore the questions in relation to each of the four classroom settings: kindergarten; grade one; grade two; and day care. Even if all the sites had been located within a kindergarten or grade one, it would still be necessary to interpret the question(s) in relation to the specific site. This is the nature of classroom life. Each classroom is like a snowflake: there are no two alike.

Coming to the question was probably the most difficult part of the research. Framing the question itself has required much thought and care. I have struggled to find

the words that would convey what has been floating around in my head and what has been unspoken and unformed but part of my understanding for so long. The question's words not only indicate a source of direction, but must also be open enough to permit exploration in many directions. The question should not be limiting but must be so. The question in some senses is part of the paradox of qualitative research. Be open enough to avoid prescription but closed enough to make possible description.

What guided my thinking as I watched these children? I wondered how they made the decisions they did. I wondered what room was made available for them to make decisions and then take responsibility for carrying them out. I wondered about the relationship they had with others, with adults, with other children. I am firmly convinced that play is the ground for learning. We play with ideas, with others, with materials and we play in ways unique to our need for exploring and experimenting as we learn about the worlds we live in.

The Mining Metaphor

I have come to know that the thoughts which emerge as one drifts between wakefulness and sleep, in a state of meditative freedom, often create a pathway for making sense of unconscious thoughts. It was in this way that the mining metaphor drifted into my consciousness. The title of this chapter is the first part of delving into the metaphor as I stake a claim on the research process.

In many ways, researching is like mining for gold. As we probe deeper and deeper into a question or problem, we descend into the depths of understanding that we hope lie beneath the surface of the question. Depth is something I am always concerned about.

Have I looked deep enough into the stories to uncover as much as I am able to see? Does it look different in this light or from this angle? Just as a gold miner descends deep into the mineshafts and tunnels to search for a seam or vein of gold, so does a researcher descend into the depths of the questions. For me, an inescapable part of this research has been the untangling of this metaphor which refused to dissipate with the daylight. I suspect I may never completely understand its power over me. Quite possibly, this research is connected to an autobiographical perspective for which I have as yet no complete story to tell.

My father was a gold miner in a northern Ontario town during my early childhood years. He worked long, and sometimes dangerous, hours beneath the surface. I took this work for granted and never thought of the implications of his profession or what it might be like until I was an adult. Nor did I think of the ramifications. What he did years ago during my childhood has had several repercussions throughout time. The impact on his health from those years meant an early death when he was sixty-two, despite the fact that it had been twenty-four years since he had worked in a mine.

A lot of my research life has been, in part, a tribute to the scholarly attitudes of my father. He lacked schooling himself but attached tremendous importance to it for his family. He was a voracious reader (of everything) and a deep thinker. We had conversations about many topics and about life and it is to him that I attribute my contemplative nature. I attempt to hold myself up to his example. Perhaps, my memories of early childhood are very strong and I associate his life as a gold miner with that time period. Certainly, the shaping of my early years was heavily influenced by location, a mining town, and my father's working life. If there was a strike, we went to the picket

line with him and listened to the strikers, huddled around a burning barrel, as they pondered whether or not to accept a five-cent raise. I helped my mother wash his underground clothes. I watched as the police surrounded the neighbour's house one night and arrested someone for highgrading (stealing gold, as my father explained). Like most children of any time, my father's working life had an impact on the attitudes I hold in the present. Am I aligning myself with the nature of my father's occupation? Perhaps. Am I aligning myself with my understanding of my father? Definitely. Since the metaphor of digging deep is such an important part of this research, I can only assume that it comes from my understanding of my father's life of a gold miner and his influence on shaping my destiny as a learner, digging deeper to really understand a concept, constantly looking for more meaning. We return to those images of our past that have had meaning in order to understand the present. In that way, we find a way to hold past and present together which makes it easier for us to understand what lies beneath our understanding of the world.

As I unpack the meanings associated with this metaphor, I have come to realize that it is depth which is so critical for me. I associate mining with being underground, being under a surface, being underneath. This leads me to think about what is underneath my research. I began by calling this study Seams of Learning. It was my notion that learning was underneath the surface of classroom activity, not necessarily the learning that we as teachers may expect to find, but definitely learning of some kind. As I thought about seams and mining, I began to think more about probing and uncovering. Much as one probes the seams of gold in a mining venture, so does the mining of information result in a similar action. Probing means digging around, picking away, examining to see

if you've found something. The research process is very much like that. One digs around for information, picks away at it to unpack meaning and examines the data for relevance and understanding. Much as we might turn over a gold nugget in a sense of wonder at having found something so valuable, so might we turn over a nugget of data, seeking to make sense out of our wondering about it.

Imagine my surprise, after I had carefully sorted out this "middle of the night image" and settled on a title that seemed to come from somewhere, Seams of Learning, only to find that gold really isn't deposited in seams but in veins. Coal is deposited in seams, gold is deposited in veins. This opened new possibilities as I pictured the veins of learning in a classroom. I saw this as the pulsing of life in a classroom dynamic as the veins of learning carry the essence of learning and curriculum. The energy of play and learning and the power of the relationships that support such exploration is available in that one word, vein. One can not live in Alberta and not understand the power of energy in our lives and the excitement it creates in its wake. My own excitement grew as I discovered that the Catherine Wheel image I had presented in the proposal for my masters' work, and which is still there sending me off into new directions, is really my own sense of energy, deep within me. Perhaps the image of the veins of learning is what is deep in my metaphor, perhaps this image will surface as I present the stories I have collected. But... I'm not changing the title of Seams of Learning. When messages come to you in the middle of the night, there is a reason and it's best not to deny, or defy, the messages.

Chapter Two

Visualizing the Seams:
A Conceptual Framework

To mine the seams in a research study requires an understanding of the terrain. As a gold miner, my father knew what the ore looked like before he chipped it out of the rock seam (or vein) under the ground. Behind him, he had a tradition of mining information on which his actions were predicated. As a researcher mining for understanding, it may be impossible for me to know exactly what I will find as I chip away at the seams. However, there is a tradition of knowledge on which I can depend. As I consider the role of children as co-creators of curriculum, I can draw on three strands that intertwine and are cohesively related:

- Teachers' and other adults' view of children and childhood;
- Prevailing views of curriculum and the notions teachers hold about curriculum;
- Play as a learning context affecting classroom curriculum.

As a frame for research, these identified foci help to concentrate the research and support the understandings uncovered, for it is in the relationships within the classroom that we find how adults view children, curriculum, and play. Because of our societal adultomorphic view, these seem to me to be the most important strands which affect our ability to allow children to be co-creators. Children's views of play and curriculum will surface in the discussion of the research itself. These understandings determine the shape of curricular endeavours in a dynamic and exciting adventure. And so, I present a discussion of the three strands that I feel are the foundation for this study's questions -- adult conceptions of childhood, conceptions of curriculum and conceptions of play.

These three strands have guided my interpretation of the uncoverings in this discussion as I sought illumination about the roles children take as co-creators of classroom curriculum.

Adult Conceptions of Childhood

Our culture survives and grows through our children. As a society we rear our young to take our places and perform our adult functions. Childhood is culturally constructed and there are as many notions of childhood as there are cultures or families (Nandy, 1987). Childhood is a contextually situated experience.

The Euro-American or mainstream view of childhood as a separate state implies that children are understood regressively through adultomorphic backward glances. Postman (1994) and Elkind (1987) lament the loss of childhood in our North American society. They state that childhood has been recently created as a separate state in an historical perspective (Leve, 1980). To understand the separation of the child's world from the adult's world requires that we realize how our culture came to exclude children from community life and set them apart. We would not otherwise feel the need to contemplate the questions about our pedagogical interest in children nor would schooling assume such importance in our culture.

In positioning the child as "other" in our culture, we guarantee ourselves as adults. Postman (1994) presents adulthood and childhood as states of being which constitute one another. The dichotomy of childhood and adulthood illustrate what each is like. It is literacy and shame which separates the child and the adult. Because we "negatively estimate" the child as inferior (Nandy, 1987, p. 56) and because the upward spiral of progress is highly valued in our North American society, childhood is seen as a

place to leave, a place to progress "from", rather than "to". The adult is a template for the child, a model on which to pattern behaviour (Das, 1989). Continuity is important to the adult world. Postman's prophetic statement, "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see" (1994, p. xi) offers insight into the adult quest for immortality through children.

The demarcation of adult and child worlds are not the sharp boundaries we believe them to be. There is a "floating relationship which cannot be described through analogy or polarity alone. Children's play reproduces the world of adults in some contexts and transforms it in others" (Das, 1989, p. 279). Instead of a stage in life, childhood is a modality of being. Thus, we, as adults, must learn to view children not as objects but as co-creators of the worlds in which both adults and children reside. We must go beyond functioning as if in a one-sided state of responsibility and see the possibilities in becoming a co-creator of a relationship which is mutually supportive and permits an interdependency.

As adults we often live within asymmetrical power relationships with children. This seems to be an inescapable reality given the physical and emotional care they require from us. When the relationship is one of power, there is no pedagogical relationship and the focus is instead on self. It is dangerous to allow power and control to dominate our reason for being with children. Instead we should see that "children are born into possibilities" and we journey with them to adulthood during an "experience in contingency" (van Manen, 1991, p.2-3). Misgeld and Jardine (1989) argue for hermeneutic solutions of seeing children and adults as "life history as it happens" (p. 270) and for "images of adulthood and childhood as a play back and forth" (p. 273). They are

suggesting that the boundaries between the adult world and the child's world should be more permeable.

The ideal adult/child relationship exists only in our imaginations, but there are some markers that would be an indication of appropriate pedagogical living with children. Both the adult and the child have expectations of each other in adult/child relationship. The relationship depends on the development of trust, dedication and openness which needs to flow in both directions (Bollnow, 1964/88). This hints at the necessity of an understanding of reciprocity. Both the adult and the child have a responsibility to each other. A pedagogical relationship is fundamentally a personal relationship (van Manen, 1991) in which the adult's role is tactful, springing from intentionality and responsibility. Children live and learn in situated and contextualized specific relationships with adults.

In our culture there is a constant focus on "self " and "other". Adults and children are sometimes in a power relationship in which it is easy to constitute children as the "other". Levinas (1985) urges us to transcend our "selves" and see our relationship with the "other" as a responsibility but not a burden. The "other" fulfills us, helps us see ourselves and makes us human. It is important to recognize the "other" as a contributor to our own development as we are contributors to the development of an "other". The "other " is part of us. In an ethical adult/child relationship, such as might be found in a school environment, this is of paramount importance since it is a realization that we are engaged in learning and teaching at the same time. Teaching and learning are two halves of the same whole.

Reciprocity is furthered in a genuine dialogue in the sense of a hermeneutical

conversation (Linge, 1977). Such conversation is active, reciprocal and concerned with a common shared subject in which adult and child come to know each other as well as the shared text in a new space. Perhaps this shared text permits us to go beyond the culturally and socially constructed barriers of childhood and adulthood, into a new space where we are able to come to new understandings about our relationships.

Adults are indeed gatekeepers. It is crucial that they understand the importance of demonstrating an ethical caring (Noddings, 1988) about children. Adults must also recognize children as capable and competent beings whose constructions of the world need to be supported, strengthened and lengthened. Adults must also recognize the importance of a life with children and the rewards of understanding ourselves as we understand children.

> The most profoundly heard message from the experience of those who have also truly lived with children is that such a life is a full time job, requiring of parent and teacher a self reflection which brings about a reordering of adult priorities in order to enter a form of life with children that is indeed a life. (Smith, 1983, p. 373)

Children must eventually become adults. Through our pedagogical understanding of children and our willingness to engage in a reciprocal, meaningful dialogue with them, we can make the barriers separating adulthood and childhood much more permeable. Such a reciprocal relationship with children would certainly inform our curriculum decisions. Indeed, some kind of adult perspective of children and childhood is generally at the heart of curricular design. To carry through with the metaphor, it is in the mining or

exploration for depth of these seams of understanding about childhood that we are able to reflect on how and why we construct curriculum in the way we do. We must seek to understand the conceptions of childhood that lie beneath how we develop what children learn in schools. Does our understanding of childhood influence our development of curriculum? I'm not sure this is always true.

Conceptions of Curriculum

The design and implementation of curriculum appears to have superseded the importance of pedagogical relationships in the classroom, no doubt because of the pressures of accountability now prevalent in our turbulent times. But, perhaps an argument could be made as well that we have never really moved beyond Bobbitt's view of reducing curriculum to a scientific investigation defined by political objectives. He maintains that curriculum should be based on an analysis of " the broad range of human experience into major fields" (Bobbitt cited in Jackson, 1992, p. 24). As the analysis process continues to break down human experience into specific activities, then the objectives of education will become evident. Is this process of curriculum formed because of our desire to understand and control that which we cannot easily categorize? Do humans really desire to compartmentalize and analyze in order to learn? Perhaps this viewpoint is too simplistic and succeeds in establishing control of the learning environment rather than promoting learning. Tyler (1949) forged on in Bobbitt's empirical tradition. He expanded the defining of objectives and learning experiences with a further two steps of organizing and evaluating learning experiences. Clearly, the legacy of a technical view of curriculum as proposed by Tyler and Bobbitt are inherent in school lesson plans today. Indeed, the teacher's role in defining and developing curriculum is

often not recognized in some historical and current classroom contexts.

> If curriculum defines and projects conceptions of valued capacities to be developed, then studies of what, how, and why teachers think as they do, cannot, in themselves provide defensible content in teacher education. (Zeuli & Buchmann, 1988, p. 142)

However, if teachers and students have the power to transform curriculum-as-planned to curriculum-as-lived, then it becomes essential to uncover understandings of how curriculum develops in the contexts of relationships and learning in a classroom environment.

Curriculum is more than a program of studies or textbook manual with predetermined sets of goals and expectations. In keeping with its verb-like qualities, curriculum seems more like an "organic design. A growing living changing design" (Ashton-Warner, 1963, p. 14). "Curriculum is a moving form" (Grumet, 1988, p. 172) and a "waterfall" (Langer, 1957, p. 48). The movement inherent in such statements reinforces the notion that curriculum is more than the static document that is referred to periodically for goals and objectives. Instead, it is the essence of classroom life, growing, changing and breathing as learners do, shaped by the reactions, reflections and social interactions of those learners.

We appear to be fascinated by the study of curriculum. Many researchers continue to debate what makes curriculum. But what roles do teachers and learners play in this dynamic? Are they co-creators? Are they authors of curriculum experiences who invite each other into learning? These reflections about curriculum merit exploration and point

to the focus of this research, which is to understand the roles that children play in the development and maintenance of curriculum in classroom settings. Children's roles and participation in the curriculum process are, however, affected by teachers' perceptions of curriculum.

Teachers' Views of Curriculum

The view of children as co-creators of curriculum implies that there is another player - the teacher. The use of the prefix "co" assumes that there is shared responsibility or participation. But sharing in the curriculum process means that teachers have given some thought to the nature of curriculum. In order to understand teachers' views of curriculum and how they think it is implemented, it is necessary to ask teachers.

Each of us comes to some tacit understanding of the nature of curriculum whether we can verbalize this or not. My own thinking about curriculum evolved during my teaching career. I have come to know that as teachers, we likely create our own interpretation of curriculum. Some of us see it as a program of studies, others see it as the lifeblood of the classroom, the dynamic of lived experience. Understanding what teachers think begins with asking them. I approached three teachers, who were not connected with this study. Each of the teachers was at a different point in her career and all agreed to participate in individual interview sessions so I could establish what their curriculum beliefs were. While the study is held together by a personal conceptualization, it is important for my understanding to be broad enough to tolerate alternate views of curriculum. The discussions with these teachers took place a year before I began the study. This enabled me to be prepared to be open to other points of view about the learning experiences that children might have in various settings. Our conversations

illuminated that understanding curriculum can be a complex undertaking.

Our discussions were "thinking through times" for these three teachers as they formulated and tested concepts to express their tacit understandings of curriculum. Teachers' stories are an expressive connection to their experiences and the reflective process of an interview allows them to make sense of their teaching lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Carol, Irene and Shirley (not their real names) agreed to share their stories with me so that I could develop a sense of how some other teachers have puzzled about the pieces of curriculum. Carol has been a kindergarten teacher for many years and in this particular year has been teaching grade one in the afternoons. This split assignment has allowed her to retain a full time position during the time when kindergarten funding cuts affect the number of hours provided for kindergarten. Irene teaches grade one and has also been a teacher for many years. She is a year away from retirement and has had a variety of teaching experiences from kindergarten through grade nine. Shirley is still fairly new to teaching and has fewer than five years experience. She has taught kindergarten (in fact, my master's study took place in her classroom) and moved to grade two during the year that this interview series took place. Thus, two of the teachers have several years' experience in teaching and one is still new to teaching. All three teachers appeared to be very committed to their work with children and eager to talk about curriculum issues.

In our conversations, two of the teachers provided a metaphor for curriculum which became a way for describing their viewpoint, but it also became a bridge for solidifying and enlarging their views.

Shirley maintains that curriculum is "what the kids need to learn, the steps, and

the skills, the progression necessary to carry on to the next step." The implication of a norm, or a standard, is very clear but subsequent discussions indicated that the how, when, and where are not as rigidly defined. Curriculum here is a noun. Shirley identified her metaphor of curriculum as a blob of clay. To me this implies that it is malleable, able to change shape, fit contexts and needs. Implicit within this metaphor is that the blob of clay is a finite amount. While it moves and changes shape, the weight or size remains constant. In this teacher's definition of curriculum as "what the kids need to learn", the blob of clay, even though able to change shape, still implies an evolution to an expected outcome. The discussion of goals and outcomes, first posited by Bobbitt in the 1920's, is indicative of Klein's (1985) technical curriculum at work.

> The subject matter design assumes extensive prior planning of the curriculum before student-teacher interaction; adult control over what the curriculum is to be; specified objectives with activities, evaluation, and resources designed to produce the desired learning outcomes; and, in large part, a standardized, common curriculum for all students. (Klein, 1985, p. 39)

This is the trap in which teachers and students are caught in our present age of distant and measurable accountability for education dollars rather than personal responsibility for learning. Shirley, Carol, and Irene all struggle with this onus and yet are very concerned that students' individual needs are met as well.

Irene defines curriculum as the program of studies but it is not an explanation for all that occurs in the classroom. It is a plan but it is not necessarily all of the content. Her

choice of metaphor is fascinating. She calls curriculum a preprimer; in other words a structured first step in an overall plan with specific outcomes. The inference of standard is very strong but the preprimer in Irene's view is meant to be seen as a support that can be left behind when experience provides the fodder for decision making about learning activity. Much as one learns to read by decoding the simple language in a preprimer, a teacher first learns about curriculum through a set of specified outcomes. After one learns the secret of decoding in a preprimer, there is freedom to move onto a less structured way of learning to read. As teachers gain experience they can leave the support of a structured document. Thus the standard is internalized and is contextualized by personal interpretation, which can be seen as a move away from the technocratic fantasy that Henderson (1992) describes as the "dominant referent for educational; practice throughout the 20th century" (p. 204). Perhaps within this preprimer metaphor it is possible to see the emergence of teacher as agent in the curriculum process and the possibility that theory and practice can become praxis (Henderson, 1992).

Carol echoed much of what Irene and Shirley gave as definitions, saying that curriculum is "the goals, expectations, and skills suitable to children so they can learn in their own way conducive to developmental stages." But she pushes the definition a little as she links curriculum to materials and implementation. In other words, curriculum is not the "what", it is the "how". Carol is unable to think of a metaphor that expresses her view of curriculum. Perhaps she has a sense that as teachers we are becoming aware of the complexity of penning curriculum up neatly in an enclosed space. The metaphors proved to me to be very useful in getting at what teachers might think about curriculum. Using an image to verbalize thoughts helps us to create in a different representational

mode. The power of metaphor is summed up in the following statements.

> Subsequently, certain kinetic and visual images have come to serve as surrogates for the original verbal formulation, which still controls the sensory imagery and remains available for ready reaffirmation...some metaphors enable us to see aspects of reality that the metaphor's production helps us to constitute. (Black, 1979, p.39).

Apart from the metaphors, there is also a prevailing, unifying motif in the conversations of these teachers. All three refer to experience as a major factor in their ability to implement curriculum in classroom contexts. Experience allows a teacher to judge what is appropriate content, organize appropriate learning experiences, and be flexible and creative in determining how content is presented. "A good teacher changes and improves with experiences and knowledge of children's needs," say Marshall, Streedain, and Zavagno (1992, p.265) who continue on to tell us that "one's overall history corresponds directly to the sort of teacher one becomes"(p. 265).

Carol says, "Creative flair develops as experience in teaching continues." Creative flair for Carol is the means to making the curriculum fit the students. Shirley's emphasis is on flexibility and experience. Beginning teachers are less experimental, less flexible because they are less comfortable developing a curriculum that fits the needs of the class. "First year teachers survive," says Shirley, echoing the stages of teacher development as survival first then consolidation (Katz, 1985). Irene's emphasis is on teacher growth ("I'm a much better teacher now") and on experience in knowing what to teach based on observing children over the years.

Curriculum decision making and curriculum implementation cannot be separate functions (Bullough, 1992) or the result may be lack of comfort in the implementation of a curriculum which has little relevance to the classroom context in which teachers live with children. As these teachers reflected on the role of experience and comfort in their teaching, they seemed to say that as teachers gain experience they are more comfortable making the curriculum their own by adapting, creating, and changing curriculum-as-plan to curriculum-as-lived. As more experienced teachers, they are able to take risks (Marshall, Streedain & Zavagno, 1992) and become more assured of their survival in the classroom, able to move through the stages of teacher development (Katz, 1985). Does this also mean that these teachers are willing to share their authority in the curriculum process? Perhaps their metamorphosis does not go this far yet. But, as I thought about what these teachers said, I began to try and put together my views in a more articulate form, building on the concepts emerging from my master's work about the nature of curriculum as lived experience. To the understanding of curriculum as fluid and ever-changing, as gleaned from Grumet, Langer, and Ashton-Warner, I have now layered the imaginative and creative motifs of Reynolds (1990).

Reynolds (1990) says that curriculum-as-plan is a warp which allows us to weave our curriculum pattern in the classroom. Her notion of recursion in pondering curriculum is helpful in seeing the connection of curriculum as both object and process. We gather an understanding that "the text of our living is simply the doing, the living and the experiencing, the learning we do"(p. 14). I am proposing that curriculum in the classroom is the form which comes from a formula (predetermined program of studies) and from the formlessness (the swirling of classroom relationships). I am beginning to

understand the lived experience that is a curriculum of learning, shared by all who participate in the culture. As teachers we live with children in the classroom and come to know them in ways others do not. In the context of our current school lives, does the delivery of curriculum ensure learning? What is the nature of the relationship among curriculum, learning and teaching?

The pressures of reaching a predetermined standard are evident in these three teachers' conversations, but so, too, is the realization that students' needs should be at the centre of curriculum. Perhaps Carol expresses this dilemma most succinctly as she contemplates the change in her teaching assignment. She describes the frustration of having to move from teaching kindergarten in the morning to teaching grade one in the afternoon.

> I am beginning to discover that I need to look at groups (rather than individuals) which goes against my personal [conviction] ... I'm having difficulty instructing the group as a whole... you can't take these children and have them fit into a formal "you must learn this" kind of situation.

The missing part of the discussion is whether or not these teachers see children as active agents in the curriculum process, as decision-makers. Their discussions indicate a willingness to see children as individuals and, I suspect, as learners who do follow their own agendas. But these three teachers indicated a definition of curriculum as a standard and thus as being outside the control of children. It seems to be the teacher's responsibility to ensure that children reach a desired outcome. Children can make some decisions in educational situations where play is valued as a vehicle for learning, as is

certainly the case in the classrooms of these teachers. Perhaps curriculum and play need further study to explore the potential for children to take more control over their learning in school settings.

Conceptions of Play

I believe that to examine play is to examine learning. For me, play is the vehicle that enables children to be learners about the world in which they live. Yet play is a slippery concept. It seems easy to accept that play is something that children do; however, it is hard to grasp and label. Why is it that play is so difficult for us to define or describe in absolute terms? Perhaps it is because meanings of play arise from our original and individual experiences and therefore it is impossible to develop comprehensive and generalized definitions. We may share common assumptions but we can not go further than outlining common characteristics of play. To get at the lived meaning of play it is necessary to go to the play itself and discuss individual episodes. Our awareness of the characteristics and qualities of play is important so that we might create the conditions which support its presence in a learning setting. However, play can only be experienced.

Gadamer tells us that "the mode of being of play does not allow the player to behave towards play as if it were an object"(1984, p. 92). Although we are aware that play is occurring, our understanding is only expressed in the details of the lived experience. If play can not be objectified, it does not fit into the concise definitions we would like to impose. "Play has its own essence, independent of the consciousness of those who play"(Gadamer, 1984,p. 92). Thus play can neither be considered only an objective quantity nor a subjective quality. It transcends our harnessing of its powers -- it is simply represented through us.

Gadamer's discussion of the "to-and-fro movement" that is inherent in the use of the word play indicates a state of being and becoming. If play is seen as movement, then there is a dynamic process occurring and some kind of change is afoot. Gadamer's ontological explanation of play and its principles moves us beyond the need to categorize or define it. The understanding of play as a state of being which is part of the human cultural experience moves us to respect children for their involvement in a learning experience and to guarantee their freedom to interpret the world.

The meanings found in play have cultural and contextual significance for us as individuals. Our cultural experiences are different. We see play through lenses coloured by the context in which play is situated within that cultural experience; thus, the associations we bring to the word play differ. Each individual recreates, through the images of past and present play, attributes which suggest a certain connotation. My conception of play is linked to my previous and present experience; thus, play as a general term does not capture the specifics unique to individual experience.

Gadamer's explanation of play as a way of being is an inside view. Scholars who have studied play extensively bring us an outside view and seem to agree on what play is like through the following statements:

- children are intrinsically motivated to play
- children have a sense of control in their play and develop their own rules for governance
- during play children express inner reality
- the focus on play is primarily on the process rather than an end result
- the child is an active agent in play

(Rogers & Sawyer, 1988; Almy, Monighan, Scales & Van Hoorn, 1984).

Play is flexible, enjoyable, and creates a positive effect. It provides children with the opportunity to "try novel combinations of ideas and behaviors" (Christie, 1991, p. 6). A distinction is often made between play -- discovering what can be done with objects -- and exploration -- establishing the properties of objects (Almy, 1984). Wasserman (1992) states that through play "we teachers can have it all; the development of knowledge, of a spirit of inquiry, of creativity, of conceptual understanding -- all contributing to the true empowerment of children" (p. 133). Play is generative, supports risk taking without fear of failure, builds autonomy and engages the mind through the activity of the body. Experiential learning, which is supported by play, arises from a view that "knowledge is not a fixed commodity" (Wasserman, 1992, p. 136). In play, children become competent beings, for play is a "social phenomenon" and often interactional (Am, 1985, p. 92). There are stages of play within the social and cognitive realms and children move through these stages as they mature developmentally (Frost & Klein, 1979). The social categories of play include a progression from solitary and parallel play through associative and co-operative, reflecting the growing child's ability to reach out to others and to leave an egocentric viewpoint behind. In terms of cognitive development, children begin with functional play with objects and progress through symbolic stages of dramatic and socio-dramatic play until they reach a stage of games with rules which represents an ability to focus on multiple aspects of concepts. The ability to problem solve deepens. However, children continue to return to previous forms of play when they encounter unfamiliar situations.

There does appear to be a difference of opinion, however, as to the kinds of play

one finds in the child's learning world. Christie (1991) evaluates three approaches to academic play as having value for the learner, but cautions against mislabeling such approaches as play. "Children can profit from teacher-guided play activities, but they also need opportunities to play on their own without adult interference" (p. 20). Too often we mistakenly label an enjoyable learning activity as play, forgetting that major criteria of play are that children originate and control the activity. Here lies a distinction between intrinsically and extrinsically motivated learning.

It might be more helpful to view play on a continuum (Frost & Klein, 1979), moving away from a dichotomous position, so that the flexibility of play can be recognized. Gallagher acknowledges that play does occur in an educational setting, but "play can be considered educational experience only to the extent that it involves us[as humans] in a meaningful world"(1992, p.118). This makes a space for the adult to take on a role. Cherry (1976) identifies three roles teachers take on -- facilitator, participant and observer. As well, teachers are scaffolders (Vaage, 1990) as they provide opportunities for choice and monitor the experiences of children so that learning can be stretched beyond the present, a Vygotskian perspective of the zone of proximal development (Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998).

As children play, they make decisions and accept the responsibility for the direction in which those choices take them. But children need significant time to engage in complex "social and cognitive forms of play" (Christie & Wardle, 1992, p.). Insufficient time, less than thirty minutes, does not promote the more complex forms of play associated with cognitive development. When children are asked to discuss what play is, they respond by indicating that play is what they choose to do themselves. If play

is assigned or controlled by someone else it becomes work (Klein, Kantor & Fernie, 1988; King, 1983). Work may still be fun since control, not necessarily enjoyment, sets the dividing line between play and work. Children as young as five understand the distinctions between work and play, according to Klein, Kantor and Fernie (1988). Even very young children recognize teachers' attempts to present work in the guise of play.

> Since dichotomies are often erroneously thought to be part of the natural order, they are not ordinarily examined critically or questioned and probed for their significance. Consequently, we forget that dichotomies are learned. For example, the distinction between work and play taken for granted by most adults is not obvious to young children. Children's definitions of work and play take shape as they interact in a variety of social settings. (King, 1983, p.3)

Thus, it is critical to remember that children do not separate what they do into neat compartments; they just do it.

The implications for looking at the context of play are fascinating. Children seem able to read social situations and to adapt their actions or behaviour to suit the context. This ability speaks to a certain resiliency that too often is not recognized as a strength children possess, a possibility of shaping the current reality in which they live. "What play shows over and over again is the possibility of changing goals and thereby restructuring reality" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1981, p.17). Children may change and adapt the nature of their play according to the contextual nuances they interpret in their environments. The interdependence of play and cultural context may shape the play

observed but it may also shape the child's real world as well.

Children's play is seldom evaluated but children's work usually is. Play can be monitored through observation and although "the quality of play cannot be measured by pupil outcomes on standardized tests, accountability demands adequate means of evaluation" (Monighan-Nourot, Scales & Van Hoorn, 1987, p.152). Perhaps this notion of accountability weighs on teachers as they seek to control the learning in play, thus transforming play into work in the eyes of the learners. The cultural transmission of our ancestors' Puritan ethic of the separation of work and play is still present in our approach to understanding the primary occupation of children as they learn about the world (Almy, Monighan, Scales & Van Hoorn, 1984). Given our present zest for accountability and measured outcomes in a predetermined program of studies rooted outside the learner's expectations, it appears that we do not value play in the lives of children; if play is what children do, are we sending a message that we also do not value children?

> We are, all of us, the actors trying to find the meaning of scenes in which we find ourselves. The scripts are not yet fully written, we must listen with curiosity and great care to the main characters who are, of course, the children. (Paley, 1986, p.131)

Perhaps the most important roles adults play have more to do with listening and following the players' leads than organizing and promoting learning through carefully constructed work/play environments. Giving up our control of children's play is incredibly difficult considering our sense of responsibility and accountability; however, it is possible we might push the boundaries of learning even further if we empower children

as learners through their play. Clearly, I am looking at children's play as the ore in this study from which I hope to chip out the gold of children's roles as co-creators in curriculum.

Chapter Three

Preparing to go Down into the Seams: The Methodology

An Interpretative Framework

As I prepared my original proposal for research, I contemplated an approach to gathering information that I hoped would be appropriate. The miner does not know what will be found until the ore is actually being chipped out of the rock. The researcher does not always know what will be found if the perspective comes from an interpretative frame. The miner has an idea what gold might look like and searches for it. The researcher might recognize the gold but does not have a visual image before starting other than being guided by the questions. Until we are actually engaged in research, we cannot know all that we will do. Of all the sections of the proposal, I found writing the methodology section the hardest. I had a game plan but the most I could say with certainty was that I planned to use a qualitative approach with an interpretive lens for examining my findings. I did have an adit to the mine, an entrance point, in the sense that I had an orientation.

> Whether stated or not, all research is guided by some theoretical orientation....Theory helps data cohere and enables research to go beyond an aimless, unsystematic piling up of accounts. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 33)

But I also had a sense that a truly interpretive frame requires that we do not prescribe all that we will do as we meander through the understandings we uncover during the gathering and analyzing phase of research. And so I started with a conceptual framework,

a paradigm composed of a "loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts, or prepositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 33) which guided my deliberation of what I felt I was observing and later thinking about. The conceptual framework previously described sets up the three strands I feel are critical to understanding the parts of my research question.

A conceptual framework should illuminate a researcher's stance. For me, it was like being on a bridge, sometimes a swinging bridge, as I sought to bring past and future together. I could not know in advance what I might need to address in the study. Nevertheless, I identified my stance as being rooted in constructivism (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987) since, at the time, this seemed to express my view of children and learning. This stance will be examined more closely as I lay out a clearer description of my three strands in the following chapter but it is important to mention here so that I might point out my conviction that I carry my *self* into the study with me. I cannot check my baggage at the door, so to speak, as my father did when he changed his clothes in the locker room on the surface before descending to the tunnels in the mine. I am a constructivist; I do hold certain understandings about the nature of children, learning and relationships, which have changed shape or flavour throughout the study, but have not disappeared. I am comfortable with this position and find confirmation for it in Smith's words as he says,

> However, the purpose is not to translate my subjectivity out of the picture but to take it up with a new sense of responsibility--to make proposals about the world we share with the aim of deepening our collective understanding of

it. (Smith, 1994, p. 127)

Gathering the Tools and Finding the Sites

In conducting educational research, it is crucial to remember that the importance of research is limited "not just to curriculum and pedagogy", but also lies "in showing the way in which the meaning of anything is always arrived at referentially and relationally rather than (for want of a better word) absolutely" (Smith, 1994, p. 119).

This proved to be especially true because I found that what was curriculum or play in one group was not necessarily the same in another group. These are the rewards and consequences of choosing to observe in more than one research site. I chose to observe in four different sites. I mention this here because this decision has a bearing on the shape of the study. I will return to a more complete description of the sites but it is helpful for the reader to know at this point that I have chosen to look at children as co-creators in the following settings: day care, kindergarten, grade one, and grade two.

I have chosen these particular sites because children are learners in a variety of educational and care settings and they may or may not have opportunities to contribute to learning in all of these settings. The inclusion of four such different sites broadens the parameters of the study so that I can look at the depth of experiences young children have in learning environments.

Another way in which the study illuminates the need to be referential lies in the understanding that this is a continuing saga for me. I talked at length in an earlier chapter of how I came to be involved in this particular study, which is a direct result of the concepts of curriculum, literacy and play that I pondered in the research for my master's

thesis. For me, this is a continuation of thinking and a deepening of ideas I have been playing with, and which I suspect I will continue to play with for some time. The Catherine Wheel image discussed in the prologue is still whirling about my head even now as I attempt closure in this study and so to posit absolute definitions is impossible.

The approach to this study is based on an interpretive frame, which I hope is an "*account for* what [I] have given an *account of*" and explicates what "experience holds for those in the situation studied" (Eisner, 1991, p. 35). This appeared to result in a plan that changed according to the setting and the characters within each of the four research sites. Since now I know where I have been, I can interpret the past (what happened) to provide some conceptualization of the future (what is possible). Interpretation is

> constitutive of the center -- of what will count as a fact, as a text, as a piece of evidence, as a reasonable argument -- and this defines its own limits and boundaries. The mistake is to think of interpretation as a structure of constraints. (Fish, 1980, p. 356)

Thus, for each site, the approach varied. While, overall, I chose to use participant observation (Spradley, 1980), I assumed a different position on the sliding scale of participation for each group and within each group during the research process. In grade two, partially because of the crowded nature of the physical space and limited opportunity to move around the space, I was very much an observer only. I had very few opportunities to interact with children without disturbing the flow of their classroom activity so I remained on the sidelines. This, I think, resulted in a more distant perspective of the group. There were certainly other issues as to why this might have happened

(which will be described in detail later), but largely I felt that the physical space did not allow me to move among the children. On the other hand, the much more relaxed atmosphere in the grade one classroom, as well as more physical space, provided me with the opportunity to move freely and become part of the group. My perspective in this setting is much more of an inside one, since I became more of a participant in the classroom culture. The children and teacher included me in all they did and I was able to abandon my detached position more easily and yet assume it when I needed to reflect on a specific observation. The observations from the kindergarten are drawn from the previous research completed in the master's thesis. These observations, while not as current as the others, provided me with the opportunity to stand on the bridge between schooling and care, as represented by a child day care program. Given the limits of my role as an observer who must sometimes stand apart, I was a participant in the culture at the end of my time in the kindergarten. The day care afforded me the opportunity to initially detach and watch from behind a one way mirror, which helped me to understand some of the culture before I entered it. I was able to enter into play quite comfortably with the children if they chose to let me. Some did, some did not. I understand their reluctance from a developmental viewpoint (Bredekamp, 1997) as I understand the developmental needs of all the children in the study. The comfort of the children was always my guide in knowing when to enter into their learning and play experiences.

As I consider my involvement in each setting now, I think that I was moving along the continuum from passive in grade two at times to active in all other sites most of the time (Spradley, 1980). However, I suspect that I did not reach the stage of complete participation in any of the sites, since I always found it necessary to step back to avoid

interfering with the children's process or to detail particular episodes that I sensed were vital to my understanding. I was able to take on the role of co-creator and frequently engaged in the process of classroom life. This enabled me to gather a well-rounded description of the activity with a "wide angle lens" (Spradley, 1980, p. 56) and I hope that as I lead the reader through the uncovering of findings that I will have become an instrument myself (Eisner, 1991) as I pass the data through the lenses of my theoretical framework. I used the conceptual framework strands as a way of considering what I was seeing. I earlier attempted to simply paint a portrait of each group but with the sound advice of my advisors, I returned to the strands of play, curriculum and adult/child relationships to filter the findings and create a comprehensive consideration of what experience was like in these research sites. I have attempted to create meaning that is cohesive and thematic.

Choosing the sites

Since I started from the viewpoint that children are active agents in their own learning and the curriculum development process, I chose environments where I believed this might be valued. A marker that I consider to be of paramount importance is that of a demonstration of an ethical caring (Noddings, 1988). I also looked for a recognition that children, though they face transitions, are capable and competent beings with their own constructions of the world, strengthened and lengthened by our adult presence in their lives as we provide the scaffold for their learning (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Based on my interviews with administrators and with the teachers, and my prior knowledge of the particular institutions, I felt confident that these criteria would be met. Next I looked for a demonstration of the belief that children are competent. This was manifested in

classrooms where choice played a major role in classroom life. I also viewed this practice as a sign that children were respected and that the teacher and child would be engaged in conversations that go beyond the text of a formalized curriculum document. While these criteria held true for the research sites I eventually chose, there were occasions when I felt the criteria were not as visible during the observation process as I had speculated they might be. However, overall, all four of these research sites provided me with valuable opportunities to consider how children play out their roles in the curriculum process and how the adult/child relationships support the dynamic that is classroom life. I did feel, in most cases, that the adults in these sites supported children and understood the pedagogical gift of learning which children give back to us when we willingly engage with them in a reciprocal, meaningful dialogue about shared texts (Gadamer, 1994).

The Tools

As part of an ethical approach to research, I sent home letters describing in detail what I would be doing in the classrooms and guaranteeing children's rights to anonymity. I included information about my desire to take down field notes and interview children and teachers. I waited for consent forms to return before I approached individual children. I sought consent from those in grade one and two before I interviewed them and interviewed only those who wished to participate so as to respect the children's right to be involved. This is harder to do with younger children so I did not interview children in the day care centre. Information from these interviews does not identify specific participants and all participants were given pseudonyms in the field notes included in this document.

Interviews were also conducted with the elementary school teachers, at times

which were convenient for them. This was much harder to do with day care teachers since there is little free time in their day. Comments and information came from them as we interacted in the room and were recorded in my field notes rather than in an interview format. Play itself is a research tool which must not be ignored. Through play, children express an inner reality, an inner view, which like a formal interview illuminates what they are thinking. The representation of their attempt to make sense of the world occurs in the play episodes in which they are so absorbingly engaged (Reynolds & Jones, 1997).

The techniques of participant observation largely consisted of gathering extensive field notes and videotaping. There were times when I journalled about questions, conjectures and inferences right in the field notes in a first level of analysis. Rough field notes were captured on site, then later expanded as they were typed and still later expanded as they formed part of the discussion in the analysis. I did attempt to videotape, but found that I could not do this without disrupting the rhythms in the classroom. In fact, I only successfully (but shakily) captured on video parts of the play in the day care setting, including one young child who stepped in and posed at every point of filming. Audiotapes were only used in the kindergarten data collection. They were not particularly successful due to the nature of children's kinesthetic approach to learning in the early years. They move around a lot, which means they are often not near the microphone.

Observations in the grade one and two classrooms took place in May during a rather cold and rainy spring. I visited the grade two class in the mornings and the grade one class in the afternoons. Visits took place three to four times a week for over four weeks. The day care observations took place later that year in the month of August. I spent mostly mornings three times a week for over three weeks in both the toddler and

preschool rooms, indoors and outdoors. The kindergarten visits took place during the master's study in 1992 during the months of April and May over a six week period. I spent three afternoons a week gathering information and playing.

The Process

It was my intention to avoid the over-eager anticipation of results and so I let some time pass from the first recording and reviewing of field notes to later beginning a look at the whole of the research experience. This seemed to provide me with some distance from the setting and allowed me to step back and explore how all of the pieces of findings might hang together. I discovered this phenomenon during my master's research and realized that percolation is an important research tool.

Interpretation, as an uncovering of findings, occurs during and after data collection. Through the sharing of the descriptions of children as active agents in the curriculum process, and of teachers and adults as participants and supporters, I hope to present a picture of what being a co-creator of curriculum is like. However, in addition to reporting what a co-creator is like, I also wish to provide some insight and help to "create meaning" for others (Smith, 1994).

> Meaning is not something we discover or have infused from the outside, it is the essence of our experiences, our becoming, as we act out, reflect on, and abstract these experiences, becomings. The pedagogical, social, political and philosophical implications of this process view are enormous. (Doll, 1990, p. 158)

Through the interpretation I will present in subsequent pages, the depth of understanding

of the seams of learning in classroom curriculum should become clearer. Just as a miner must have tools to chip out the gold, so must I, as a researcher, have the tools of an interpretative methodology to uncover the meanings in the stories I will present about children as co-creators. My understanding of this research process comes about through my immersion in the process itself and in the lived experience of the classrooms. To mine gold it is necessary to actually go down into the tunnels.

Chapter Four
Entering the Tunnels: The Research Sites

Once equipped with the methodology as the tools needed for this mining expedition, it is necessary to enter the site or the tunnels where the gold is actually located. The starting point in the tunnels for me in this continuing study lies in the kindergarten experience. It is also the bridge spanning the tunnels since from this vantage point I can look in other directions at early childhood experience. Indeed, it seems to be a pivotal setting, almost school and yet still well within the realm of developmentally appropriate practice we usually associate with early childhood programs which fosters learning and growth through play. Because I wished to see what happens for children in other settings within an early childhood focus, I have looked at additional sites which include:

1. a day care, because children start to learn long before they enter a school setting;
2. elementary school grades one and two because children are still well within an early childhood period but the experience changes as the setting and the expectations alter.

The order of the description of the sites is not based on a linear understanding or progression through the grades but rather on my own perception of the starting point of the study - kindergarten. The other sites are described in a way which flows from my sense of what I perceive to be the similarities of the children's experiences. Because I feel it is critical to provide the reader with a sense of what the experience is like for children, the descriptions will be narratively developed and give a sense of what a day in the life of students is like in each of these settings. The narratives provide a composite day for each of the four sites which has been developed from all of the observations.

Kindergarten

It is early afternoon on a sunny March day in the kindergarten program and five year olds are just entering the classroom. They have been bused to school and enter as a whole group, laughing and chattering, as they discuss what happened on the way to school. The teacher and her assistant have set up the learning environment ahead of time, so they are now free to join in the discussion, and to greet children as they hang up coats and store boots, mittens, and hats. Sixteen boys and six girls in this program make their way to the rug area for circle time. They sit carefully with legs tucked underneath them and listen as the helper for the day chooses the name cards to show and holds them up. As children recognize their names, they respond by raising a hand, making a noise or providing a phrase. This part of the daily routine has been internalized well and primarily provides the teacher with information about absences. She will presently send the helper with the list of absences to the main school office. However, it is also an important literacy activity in that children are learning about the meaning and purposes of print in their everyday lives.

During circle time, the children and teacher focus on the days of the week, the month and the date as well as discuss plans for activities at the centres. The teacher demonstrates a possible art experience, and provides information about materials and the choices available. For example, today the housekeeping centre has become a house again instead of a post office and space creatures can be made at the art centre using newspaper that has been rolled up and stuffed inside a paper bag.

Children are now ready to choose a centre and leave the circle after telling the teacher their choice which she records on a class chart. Soon children are busy at the

centres. At this stage in their school career, they have already learned about the routines of the classroom and the importance of choosing and carrying out an activity. Developmentally, many of them are already moving to Piaget's stage of concrete operational thinking so they are able to consider more than one option among the many they have and to formulate a plan of what they might like to accomplish in the afternoon. As a result, children move from experience to experience with little adult guidance.

Because some children are already hungry, they choose the snack area where they can serve themselves the fruit or treats brought from home; others go to the art centre where the teaching assistant provides some instruction, but encourages children to make their own choices with regard to recycled materials and some specialty items. Space creatures, all of which express a distinct and unique personality, soon emerge from the fertile imagination of the children.

The block centre, located next to the art centre but separated by the boundary of a shelving unit, is a hubbub of activity today. Sometimes this large block centre is closed (a sad face hangs over it as a pictorial reminder) but today the builders are busy constructing boats and motorcycles, all the while maintaining a flow of narrative as they build. Eventually, they will create a narrative of play as they switch from building the props to playing with them. Manipulative toys like Lego, small vehicles and blocks, as well as a large dollhouse also fill this centre's spaces. The choices are plentiful.

Next to the block centre is the housekeeping area which is framed by a large Wendy house. It contains a child-sized table and chairs, other small kitchen appliances and furniture, plastic food, dress-up clothes, dolls and a phone. A wedding with the stuffed animals and the dolls is planned, the phone rings for one of the four occupants

and a visitor comes. Normally only four children can play in the space so the visitor creates a problem which must be solved. The teacher, who catches this, asks the visitor how she will solve this problem; the result is that the visitor decides on another area in which to play. The house is a very busy place today. The phone is constantly ringing, the dolls need dressing for the wedding and food must be prepared.

The art table has become a very busy place, too. The teaching assistant reminds children that the centre is available to them and maintains her supportive role in this particular centre. Unlike most days, there is no helping parent today. Meanwhile, the teacher floats from centre to centre checking on children's needs for play and learning, facilitating through the use of questions, providing materials, information, support and whatever else is needed to maintain the flow of the learning and play. Over in another corner of the room is a child sized couch surrounded by books, a listening centre with record player and records, tape recorder and tapes and posters. Two children are cuddled up on the couch reading a book from the shelf and a third child is lying out on the floor area listening to a record.

The circle area is often used by the children as a gathering spot, a place where they can take their dolls or books to participate in a group experience or a place where they can be alone if quiet is what they seek. Sometimes children continue their play with the name cards, holding them up for each other, practicing the recognition of the names and playing at being the teacher.

There are two tables that have language and math concept activities spread out on them. Some children come to trace letters occasionally and others come to organize a math game. A science area sits on top of the water/sand table. There are plants growing

in this centre which children come to measure and observe. As the afternoon progresses, the children are observed getting deeper and deeper into the activities and centres of their choice. Everyone is busy and involved. The centre time portion of the day continues for approximately an hour, with a warning period given for an approaching cleanup time.

After cleanup, children may have a library or gym period. Perhaps a field trip will be scheduled or a group activity such as cooking. The day usually ends with a group meeting of some kind, often involving a story, a dramatization or a focus on numbers or the alphabet. Today we are hearing more about Frog and Toad and their adventures. Questions are answered about the story and children's interjections and observations are noted and respected by the teacher even though she insists that she needs to have quiet and appropriate behaviour in the circle. Soon it is time to go home. Children gather up any projects they wish to share with families, struggle into winter clothing, remember to take home notes and cheerfully reply to the adults' wishes for a good evening and a hope to see them again tomorrow. It has been a productive and happy day for most.

Day Care

There are two rooms in this day care setting. It is a demonstration program which means that it is visited frequently by students, college instructors, and other interested community members so children are used to seeing adults other than their primary care givers involved in the day to day classroom life. Many children attend day care on a full day basis, starting as early as 7:30 a.m. and leaving as late as 5:30 p.m. It is summer time and the sun shines brightly on the playground outside. Inside there are two large rooms. One room is home to toddlers, children aged 19 months to 3 years while in the other

room there are 3 to 5 year olds. Because there are really two programs operating here for different ages, an overall view of the routine of the day care will be provided. Specific information from each of the rooms will be included in appropriate places.

The day starts at 7:30 a.m. with just a few children. Since this is a downtown location, most children will come a little later, dropped off as parents go to work and school. Because it is summer, fewer children attend on a regular basis. Children and staff engage in self-selected activities until snack comes in at approximately 9:30 a.m. after which children return to self-selected activities. Some are filling and dumping containers in the sand or water, others are moving small vehicles back and forth along the tops of the low bookshelves. Two children are playing with milk carton blocks, stacking them up and knocking them down. One child is on his own wandering around the back of the room, pretending to hammer on the viewing window with a plastic toy. And one child is hugging a small stuffed animal and watching others. Snack is one of the choices available to the children. Staff remind children that it is available but will be cleaned up soon. By 10:00 or 10:30 a.m. most children in the centre are playing outside, if weather conditions are appropriate. Toddlers usually go out first and come in first. Lunch is served shortly after 11:15 a.m. for toddlers and 11:45 for preschoolers. More time is given for self-selected quiet activity and then a naptime or quiet time occurs. Children generally wake up and become more active between 2:00 and 2:30 p.m. at which time they continue with self-selected activities indoors or outdoors. A regular routine of sunscreen and hats is imposed. Children generally continue playing until they leave to go home, which may be at any time between 3:00 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. It is a gradual leave taking. In both rooms there are small whiteboards set up informing visitors about what

may happen in the room that day. For example, the toddler room board says:

Today we

- hunt for dinosaurs
- create shapes with wet sand
- explore the difference between smooth and rough
- water our grass seed

In the toddler room there are two staff with the children, a student involved in a practicum and a parent and child who are new to the centre. The children in the room are in the 2 to 3 year old range. Outside it is sunny in the big play yard. The windows of the building face south. The centre is surrounded by an eight-foot stone wall which secludes the children from the traffic of a busy street. The children are having snack as I arrive, but they are anxious to go outside and run to the window and the door to look at the play yard. Sunscreen on, hats on, we all go out to play. One child goes immediately to the sand with a shovel and a pail. She fills and dumps and fills some more and dumps some more. Two other children are donning helmets to ride the tricycles on the cement paths which meander throughout the yard of sand. Other children are clambering on the lower levels of the climber and going down the small slide, assisted by one of the staff. Still more children are sitting on the wooden structure that resembles a car and some children are playing a game of chase with staff on the cement pathways. Adults are constantly observing and facilitating play, as they set out more shovels with which to dig in the sand, lift children who require help on the climber or help children move equipment from one side of the yard to the other. Staff are always on the lookout for safety concerns. Play continues for some time and soon it is time to go in to get ready for lunch. Some children

have to be convinced that this is so and are reluctant to leave their play. Inside hands are washed and children find themselves a space for lunch at the small tables which have been pushed together. Three staff members sit with the children to eat lunch. The cots had been set out in the rest of the room while the children were outside so that all is ready for naptime. The children help themselves to food but are assisted as needed. They can serve themselves and pour juice from small pitchers. Discussion is lively, largely about birthdays since one of the group members will have a birthday soon and will be leaving this room to go to the preschoolers' room. Happy Birthday is sung along with some nonsense words and soon children go off to have a playtime until they are ready to nap. Meanwhile some staff are engaged in cleanup while another is counting and singing with the children as part of their play. Diapering and washing happens next. Staff in this centre feel strongly that children should have a consistent caregiver with them in the diapering process and that eye contact is important. Diapering takes a significant chunk of time. Children gradually relax on the cots ready to sleep. Soft music is played, backs are rubbed, the blinds are closed, the room gets quieter and soon children are drifting off to sleep. Most of the toddlers do still sleep in the afternoon, but for those who don't there is the alternative of quiet play with puzzles or small toys on their cots.

Children wake up as gradually as they have gone to sleep. Sometimes one child will still be sleeping while all the others are up and playing in the room. Today there is a hockey game. One of the tables is set up with a blue surface and two children are using small sticks to push an object back and forth across the table. Another child comes over to place his truck on the table which results in an opportunity to problem solve. An adult helps him to frame the questions and provides possible solutions. Sometimes, as in this

case, compromise is not possible with toddlers, a developmental expectation. The truck must go on the table but the hockey game must also continue. Looks like a stalemate but with careful discussion, the caregiver and the child move to another location with the truck. However, the hockey game quickly ends and a discussion about trucks and monkeys ensues.

Nearby, a child is playing with a hammer, singing "Augie, Augie" repeatedly. Over in the sand another child sings to herself as she scoops and dumps wet sand. Snack arrives and one child moves one red chair out of the way so that he can move another red chair in its place close to the table. He sits down to eat, conversing with the adults and other children as they come to the table. As in the morning, snack is a choice but is only available for a limited time. Play continues after snack until it is time to go home.

The preschoolers follow a similar routine. Their play is much more group oriented. In the room this morning, the children are playing on the large climber while a staff member assists and watches for safety concerns. There are four staff today, one of whom has responsibility for a child with a special need. The children climb up the steps then race one after the other down the slide, so fast they are almost on top of each other. The adult discusses the safety issue with them and redirects them. In the house corner, the children are setting the table and putting a meal together. A staff member is engrossed in this play with a group of four children. At one point, a group member exclaims, "We're still missing some spoons " and they hunt through the cupboards. One child is at the computer centre with a staff member, another at the water centre, pouring water back and forth between containers. An adult is playing checkers with a child who has a look of fierce concentration on his face. A parent and a child are cuddled up in the book corner.

In the block centre someone is rolling a car down a ramp made out of unit blocks. It seems that everywhere in this busy and full room children and adults are engrossed in their play.

Soon it is time for outside play but first sunscreen must be applied. Each child has his or her own labeled bottle as well as a sunhat. Outside the boys are busy digging in the sand. The toddlers have just gone in to prepare for lunch so the yard is empty except for the preschoolers just coming out. In one corner of the play yard, they pile the sand up and pretend it's a volcano. Some children truck the sand in a wagon to another part of the play yard. Two girls are arm in arm as they wander about the yard, laughing and chatting about what they see. Someone is sifting sand into plastic containers. On the climber, children are racing to the top to see over the top of the surrounding wall; they try to catch a glimpse of the emergency vehicles on the street. The sirens are loud but don't last long and it is only by stretching that they are able to catch a quick look. Over in the far part of the play yard two girls are on a wooden car, pretending to drive far away and another child is playing on TUGGY, a large plastic boat. Someone else is hanging upside down on the red bars of the climbing equipment.

Soon it is time for lunch and children re-enter the room reluctantly, after cleaning up in the play yard. Lunch is served in the same manner as in the toddler room. Children serve themselves, pouring juice and helping themselves to food. Staff sit with the children at the small tables and all engage in conversation that is lively and exciting. After lunch there is a quiet time when some children sleep while others play quietly. Blinds are closed, soft music is played, and staff interact with children in a calm and soothing manner.

As in the toddler room, snack follows the quiet time but on a nice sunny day such as this one, it is served outside in the play yard. Children choose to come as they feel hungry, but again snack is only available for a short time. Play continues until it is time for children to start leaving. As the day gets warmer and the yard gets hotter, children go inside to play in the cool darkness of the classroom until family members come to take them home. Staff and children share with parents how the day went and remind them of what might be happening on the following day.

Elementary School

The next two sites are both located in an elementary school in a small town. This school, one of three in this community, has slightly over four hundred students, from kindergarten to grade four. Grade five students attend a nearby middle school. This community is rapidly growing and there has been some crowding experienced in local schools. This school has, in addition to the regular English program, a French Immersion program and an Early Intervention program and has undergone recent renovations which have unfortunately reduced the physical size of the classrooms. Children with special needs are integrated into programs and supported by program assistants in the classroom. The grade two classroom was observed in the morning. The grade one classroom was observed in the afternoon. Classes start in the morning at 8:35 a.m. and run until 12 noon and in the afternoon from 12:50 p.m. till 3:15 p.m. It is May and we are experiencing unseasonably cool spring weather. These environmental factors certainly influence classroom experience. Children come into class wet and muddy which sets up discussion. The lack of recess time affects the mood of the classroom since children do not have the

option of outdoor physical activity.

Grade One

This group of grade one children has two teachers, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The afternoon is filled with math, science, personal development and art. The teacher in the afternoon is also the school counselor and has many years of teaching experience at the primary level. In fact, she was previously the kindergarten teacher for some time at this school. Her manner with the children reflects an easy and relaxed relationship.

The children, eight boys and ten girls, are just coming in from a noon time break. The weather has been cool and cloudy, but today for the first time in a long time, it is not raining. There are two girls with special needs present today. The teacher meets and greets them all at the door, talking individually with each child. They excitedly tell her all that has happened this morning, sharing as well some of their noon time experiences. On the white board is a message from the parent supervisor. It is in the shape of a heart in which are written the words "All of the students were excellent at lunch time" (excellent is underlined three times). Music is playing and soon teacher and students are clapping and snapping to the beat, getting ready for their afternoon together. The teacher provides some feedback on the message and what happened at lunchtime.

Math is the first area of study this afternoon. Soon the children are talking about temperature, referring to the temperature guide on the white board and there are excited answers to the questions posed by the teacher. They have lots of ideas about how they should dress for +25C. The discussion changes to other forms of measurement and on to

estimating. It is now 1:30 and time for math bins. A group of three students from another class joins them. Children move to math bin groups; everyone knows where to go. The teacher spends very little time explaining. The math bins each contain an activity based on a math concept that has been part of the curriculum. Children measure items, work with real coins, experiment with small clocks, explore shapes, create number lines, and practice basic facts through hands on experiences and concrete materials. In the classroom there is certainly some noise but everyone seems to be busy and involved.

Groups are talking, negotiating, and sharing what they are learning with each other. Money is counted, hopscotch is drawn using number facts, shapes are cut out of shiny metallic looking self-adhesive paper, clocks are arranged on the ledge of the white board with their hands pointing to different times, a puzzle is laid out on the small work table, a riddle is being solved using number facts as the clues for the letters that make up the answer, computer games are played and replayed, and pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters are added.

By 1:55, music begins to play again signaling that it is time to cleanup. Children work quickly and efficiently and soon all attention is focused again at the front of the room as children slide back into their desks which are organized in short straight rows. They are trying to sit straight and still but the excitement of sharing what they have discovered this afternoon is too much for some who are in and out of their seats constantly. The teacher whispers something quietly and the group becomes more attentive and ready to listen. They are now discussing the answer to the riddle. The group that worked on this explains the process and provides the question. No one in the class gets the answer although there are lots of guesses. Finally the group gives the correct

answer. The recess bell rings and off they go chattering and giggling.

Outside the girls are skipping, using rhymes they have adapted from the ones I remember as a child. The boys fly by, engrossed in a chase game of some kind. Two of the children are pushing students in wheelchairs on the cement walk around the school. When the bell rings, there is a rush to get back to the classroom. They share recess stories with the teacher who listens attentively. It's time for art and today the children will be making mother's day gifts - a brooch decorated with beads, sparkles, and other "beautiful junk." Materials are laid out on the worktable and after some instruction regarding the process, children are encouraged to choose what they need and return to their desks to get started. The teacher moves around the room, making suggestions, commenting on patterns, linking what they are making to what they have learned, and providing support and resources as required.

Time seems to fly by for all of us, but most children have finished gluing and are ready to let the brooches dry until the next stage of production. After cleanup, it's time for a story on the rug. Some children are still working as the story starts but finish quickly and come to the rug. One child is still cleaning up and another is still gluing beads. It is understood that they will listen as they continue working. An altercation between two children is the only interruption. The teacher asks how they should handle a problem and the children respond "talk it out!" Soon it is resolved and the story continues. The afternoon ends as the bell rings indicating hometime. They have finished reading the story but were still discussing it. As they get ready for hometime, the teacher responds to individual comments and questions from children as they put on coats, put materials away in lockers, remembering to take home lunch bags and backpacks. A mother comes

into the room to pick up a child and shares information with the teacher. They appear to have a relaxed and friendly relationship. Other children have left to catch a bus or to walk home, but all have had an individual chat with the teacher before leaving the room. So ends the afternoon session of the class. It is 3:15 p.m.

Grade Two

There are twenty-five students in this physically small classroom, including a child with special needs and his teaching assistant. The room contains a number of brightly coloured student art projects, posters, signs, pictures and books. It seems to be a rich and literate environment for children's learning. The classroom is set up with rows of desks and there is also a small rug area by the one window which is a southern exposure, a table for group work on the other side of the room, and a computer set up at the back near the lockers which are inside the room. There is an overall feeling of a lack of space for these growing bodies and the teacher. Often three of the desks are pushed up to the white board at the front of the room for the children who have been too noisy. During their 3 hour and 25 minute morning, children are industriously engaged in language arts, followed by physical education in the gym, French in another classroom, recess, and finally a long block of math before lunch. After recess and before math, they generally listen to a story as they eat a snack brought from home.

This particular class has had a number of substitute teachers over the past few months. Their regular classroom teacher has been on sick leave but finally the class has a long-term substitute. She has been with them for only one month and there have been challenges for both the teacher and the children in this class, since it is now close to the

end of the school year. Both teacher and students must adjust to a new routine and a new relationship at a time in the year when most classroom inhabitants are becoming quite relaxed with each other. For these children and their teacher, it is just like September all over again. There are new expectations for everyone.

Today is rainy and cool. There have even been a few snowflakes mixed with the rain and there are quite a few sneezes in the classroom. The teacher seems to be losing her voice as she is struggling with a cold. The children are busy working in their workbooks, thinking about what kind of animals are in the story and identifying them on the workbook page. On other days they'll brainstorm words and phrases for creative writing, learn about the mechanics of writing or write letters to the Giant's child. The Giant's child is an imaginary person they have been writing to for some weeks now and they have even received replies to their letters. This strategy, adapted from a workbook experience, seems to have provided some motivation for the creative stories I have seen. The teacher is moving around the room asking questions, providing help when needed, and checking to make sure all is quiet. As she moves through the room she occasionally stops at the desk of someone who is concentrating and on task. She puts a stamp on a box on the small paper grid on the desk's corner. When students have 30 stamps, they can cash the paper in for a prize which the teacher keeps in her desk especially for this purpose. She asks students to turn around and to work on their own. Some students are working on workbook pages but others have progressed to other worksheets. They have been working steadily for the past 40 minutes and it will soon be time for gym so students are hurrying to finish, all except for one, who will remain behind until he finishes. He eventually joins them near the end of the gym lesson.

In the gym today they are playing a game which appears to be "dead rabbit". There is lots of laughter and screeching and the teacher seems to be an observer here. The children are interpreting and enforcing the rules for each other. Soon they arrive breathless at the door as they begin to line up for French. They pause at the water fountain for a drink and are making a fair bit of noise. They seem to be restless today and have to be reminded that they should be quiet in the hallway.

As they file into the French classroom they are greeted by Madame and the regular classroom teacher leaves to work on marking and preparation. Madame asks them to be "listeners today" and the French lesson proceeds. After pushing back the tables, the dance session begins, but it is noisy and soon they switch to another activity. Madame reminds them to "ecoutez" and reads a story. They appear to recognize much of the vocabulary in the text and respond appropriately with questions and answers. They comment on the illustrations and name the pictures. At last, recess!

Outside they run and jump, gather in groups or play alone on the bars of the steps leading into the school, skip in pairs, and engage in conversations with friends from other classrooms. For the most part they seem to enjoy gross motor activity and arrive back in the room just after the bell goes, still talking excitedly about the games played at recess. It's time for snack, which most children have brought with them today and they slip easily into the routine of eating and listening to the story - a Stephen Cosgrove story called *The Muffin Muncher*. They ask questions, offer comments and share their reactions to both content and illustrations. Today they are listening to the story and seem engaged unlike yesterday when the teacher finally closed the book without finishing and asked them to put their heads down on the desk.

Math Mad Minutes comes next which does not seem to be everyone's favourite activity. There are groans and sighs. Mad Minutes are timed quizzes focused on basic facts, subtraction or addition, and are a daily routine. Sheets are passed back through the rows amidst grumbling but everyone gets to work right away. Today they have 3 minutes to complete the quiz.

This activity is followed then with a more concrete math lesson. Everyone gathers on the rug area at the back of the room as they discuss the rice measuring activity from yesterday. Today the teacher holds a one litre milk carton and they talk about the word litre and the symbol. Other metric symbols are discussed but the teacher says once again that there is too much noise and the children return to their desks to finish this lesson. This will be followed up later with a workbook page for reinforcement. Math is generally a fairly long time period, running for approximately one hour and 30 minutes but the pace is varied with individual work, group lessons, and workbook pages. Now they are working on a math problem in their scribblers about bugs, focusing on how many legs millipedes and centipedes have. A structure is demonstrated for the answer on the story problem which they glue into the scribbler. Students are busily working out the answer and helping each other. The teacher reminds them that it needs to be quiet and that they should do their own work. Because some students would race ahead in their workbooks, the teacher reminds them to stop after the pages for today. In this way, she says to them all, she hopes to avoid the confusion they might experience. If they have finished everything, and many have, they can work on the math bins, a collection of group oriented concrete activities set up specifically to address the concepts of the math program. While the groups get a little noisy during this time period, the teacher does not

insist on them being quiet. As lunchtime approaches the groups take responsibility for cleaning up and organizing the math bins and for getting each other ready. The children seem to be aware of time and know when they must start to get ready for a whole group session again. One student looks at the clock and announces it is nearly lunchtime since it is two minutes to twelve.

A room supervisor (parent volunteer) comes in during lunch and many students do stay. Sometimes, they will listen to music or watch a video, especially if the weather is bad and they can't be outside. Today they will continue to watch Star Wars, this week's lunchtime feature. After lunch these students will continue on with science, social studies, more language arts, health or art, and personal development. They have had a busy and full morning and they seem to enjoy the opportunity to move and socialize during lunch.

The descriptions of these research sites has been drawn largely from a composite of the daily experiences children might have. All events described have actually occurred but have been juxtaposed to provide a comprehensive look at the lived experience of the classrooms. Each setting is unique, in part constructed by the environment (physical, emotional, sensory and educational) that the participants, children and adults, experience and to which they all contribute as they form a teaching - learning relationship with others. These are the rock walls of the tunnels where it is possible to search for the gold in the seams of learning of classroom life.

Chapter Five
Mining for the Gold:
Play

Part of the luxury of being an observer of groups of children lies in the opportunity to fully experience the wide lens (Spradley, 1980). Because of the nature of this particular study, I was able to see the many different landscapes of learning (Greene, 1978) that children might experience as they journey through the early childhood years. Consequently, my understanding of play and how and where it happens and even why it might happen, has broadened considerably. Greene (1978) tells us that "persons are more likely to ask their own questions and seek their own transcendence when they feel themselves to be grounded in their own personal histories"(p.2). As I am writing this document, I hold in my mind this image of a learning landscape embodied for me as play. I see the players engaging in transformational activity, combining and recombining what they know now with what they will know in the future, transcending the everyday in their environments to create new landscapes.

Each group of children that I observed in play seemed to demonstrate some of the characteristics of the specific age group to which they belonged. While play is specific to the individual, some of what I observed could be seen as a trend or pattern exhibited by many of the children in the toddler, preschool, kindergarten, grade one or grade two classes.

As I watched toddlers, I saw play as a functional exploration of the world and focused on the routines of life, such as sleeping, eating, and bathing. Preschoolers in the day care setting worked on relationships through their play. They have layered discoveries about the people in their lives onto the functional exploration of the world

they began as toddlers. In kindergarten, five-year-olds seemed to be experiencing the sudden explosion of their own skills, moving into a literate world and encompassing all that they knew before into the richness of the present. They are truly the transitional people in this research story. The six year olds in grade one have crossed the transitional border into the play of the school world but still manage to be the active agents in their own story while the children in grade two have learned that sometimes play has to come in different forms and may even "go underground" because of the requirements of school life. Regardless of the nature of the play experience for individuals or for groups, play still appears to be an important part of the learning process for children in the early childhood years. Because learning is, to me, the mediation between curriculum (the what) and the learner (the who), learning embodied in play is one of the primary ways children can contribute to classroom curriculum. This view flows from the constructivist position I have earlier described and has been strengthened by examining the gold in the seams of classroom learning. It is also fascinating to consider the roles that the children and the adults who play with them take as co-creators.

Children have personal and contextually coloured play experiences; thus, play is different for all of the individuals in these groups. However, it is possible to see some overall trends in the kinds of play and access to play within their learning environments. As well, observing the play of groups permits speculation about some of the emerging themes of children learning about the world. As adults watching children's play, we can look with retroactive gaze at what the process of coming to live in the world may be like. We can look at these veins, these seams of learning. Some veins are right at the surface while others require digging to find the richness and the treasure of learning beneath the

obvious routines of classroom life.

Looking in the Seams

I want to begin with some brief discussion about what play was like in each setting and then move on to some of the themes that emerged (and merged) for me. These experiences will be viewed through the limits of my perception of the children's play worlds.

A colleague recently talked about teachers whose hearts and souls are in the kindergarten classroom (Vaage, 1997). I confess that mine are there as well and so it seems entirely logical for me to begin with kindergarten. My only reason for doing so is that this is where I want to start. In considering the set up of this dissertation I have agonized about stringing the descriptions and the discussion out in linear fashion, simply because we label them that way. I feel strongly that to adhere to a linear pattern reinforces a linear approach to learning and I am concerned that to view the movement through different grades as progression or advancement is too simplistic and doesn't tell the whole story. Learning is not a hierarchical process and there is value in each learning situation. Too often we are preparing children for the future instead of celebrating the learning in the present. Thus, just as I did earlier, I present kindergarten first and then day care and then grade one and lastly grade two. The kindergarten story is actually where I entered the journey in this study.

Kindergarten

Play seems to be the consuming activity in this kindergarten classroom. Although there are indeed group times and field trips and library visits, the majority of the time is

spent in learning in self-directed ways -- through play. Children engage in play for at least half, and sometimes more, of their kindergarten day. The players create new possibilities through socio-dramatic play, building and expanding on what they already know, experimenting with roles and with their understanding of concepts. They replay the world as they know it and as they fantasize it to be. Critical to these opportunities is the provision of time, space and materials, the creation of a physical and emotional environment which supports this kind of curriculum development and the willing participation of the adult/teacher who sees herself as a partner in learning -- a co-creator. In fact, as in this example, her role is one of subtly influencing the children to take more responsibility for the use of space. She purposefully locates specific centres adjacent to one another to facilitate this.

> For some time Miss Fisher had been encouraging children to integrate their play into other areas of the room. This has been resisted by the children as they maintain specific activities like house and blocks within the confines of the individual centres. However, as the boys in the block centre begin their fire truck constructions, their play extends further into the rest of the classroom each day, until the narrative takes them into the house to put out fires. The construction of the props in the block centre alone is not enough to push out the boundaries of play. It is the development of the narrative that finally allows children to let go of their rigid notion of where play can occur. It is the

> narrative which sends them to the art centre to make gas masks and oxygen tanks. It is the narrative and excitement of a fire truck theme which encourages the integration Miss Fisher has been seeking as a sign of developing maturity in play. (Brown, 1993, p. 86)

The development of the narrative for play frees the children from their stereotypical understanding of what play can occur in which space and allows them to transcend the rigidity of their understanding of the roles they can take in learning. King, Chipman and Cruz-Janzen (1994) tell us that children in the early childhood classroom already exhibit stereotypical understandings of gender. This was evident in their initial refusal to integrate. It is only when they allow play to take them beyond these notions that they cross into a deeper understanding of the possibilities. The teacher here extends her facilitating role (Cherry, 1976) into one of co-creator. Her encouragement of their integrated use of the space and materials implies shared power which leads me to speculate that she is a co-creator as she influences them to take on new roles of responsibility.

Children in kindergarten are playing with ideas that they have seen in the world around them. To understand these concepts, it is sometimes necessary to recreate the situations as in this example.

> Billy is on the phone. He is calling 89634. He has the pencil stuck behind his ear, just in case he needs it. The grocery store workers, so the boys say, are often called to the phone while they are working. Meanwhile, Danny is

> making money. On small sheets of paper he writes 10 saying "ten" to himself. On more paper, he writes 100, saying "one hundred" to himself. Finally, he writes 1000, again repeating the number to himself. Then he leaves the centre. Billy comes to the table and watches as Donny points to a sign that has a picture but no price. "That means it's free," says Donny. Billy appears to be writing on a piece of paper and it appears to be a cheque but he makes no comment on his action. Donny is now making GST coupons. These are little signs about one inch square that have the letters GST printed on them. He writes and then tells the others that this says GST. (Brown, 1993, p.40)

Clearly, these boys are attempting to make sense of the experiences in shopping they've had. By replaying the incidents and making their own money and GST coupons, they are trying to understand the concepts. While engaged in making money, Donny demonstrates the beginning understanding of number 10, 100, 1000 and the sequence involved. Through their play, these children have created the content of their learning -- the "what," drawing from the real world and their experiences and becoming co-creators. The learning about number and money and the processes involved in the real world of shopping come from them and shape the classroom curriculum. Learning is contextualized for them and thus more meaningful than a workbook page. Learning about money comes when they are interested in it.

Toddlers

According to Piaget, very young children live in the sensorimotor period (Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998)) and toddlers appear to be in the process of crossing into the symbolic world. They are still very functional players, examining, probing, turning, repeating actions for sheer pleasure as seen when they feel sand run through their fingers or taste rocks as they put them in their mouths. They explore their world as they dump water out of and fill up containers, only to pour it out again. Toddlers in day care seem to be learning about the routines of life -- snack, diapering, getting ready to go outside, coming in, washing, eating lunch. All of these experiences are opportunities to be observers and experimenters in a very functional way, as this example illustrates.

> Dana, a caregiver, is at the water table with a child who appears to be washing something and wringing out the cloth repeatedly. The child dips the cloth in the water, brings it up out of the water and using both hands squeezes the cloth. I am unsure if there is really water in the water table or if the child is simply replaying an event from previous experience. However, what seems important to me is the repetition and the sense of focus this child displays. Again she brings the cloth up and wrings it out and then back down it goes. The next time she pulls the cloth up, she wipes the nearby table and bookshelf and it is possible to see that there is indeed a stream of water left in the wake of the cloth. Meanwhile Dana, the caregiver, has been saying

> to the child, "I'm here to check to see if you want snack -- it's going back to the kitchen -- last call." No answer from the child as she continues to wash and wring. Again Dana tries but still no answer and finally Dana says, "Don't want any? OK?" (Field notes, August 2, 1996)

The child is obviously engaged in the very functional play of experimenting with water in washing and wringing, a mirroring of what she sees in the adult world, to the exclusion of the other routines of the room. Though Dana is persistent, the child is equally committed to her own agenda of playing out the routine through functional experimentation. First of all, this example demonstrates that the child is using her physical knowledge of the routine, washing and wiping, to play through to a more complex state of learning of the physical properties of water. Craig, Kermis and Digdon (1998) state that children build knowledge through physical play which takes them to "higher levels of understanding and competence" (p.344). The child's level of concentration, which seems to include blocking out the adult's conversation, indicates the importance of, and the absorbing quality of, the repetitive nature of the play. It is the routine, a repetitive experience in itself (as are most routines) which seems to dovetail with the nature of the functional play (Frost & Klein, 1979).

As I observe, the classroom seems like a room of individuals as opposed to a group, which I view as developmentally appropriate (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). For those children who are concerned with other players and who have moved away from focusing on solitary or parallel play, the critical pivot point appears to be the emergence of symbolic play into their worlds, which is carefully mediated by an adult/teacher. The

following example details a playful interaction between a caregiver and a child who is in the process of making the transition from the toddler playroom to the preschool playroom.

> Donna, a caregiver, and Harriet are playing together. Donna pretends to be the traffic police officer and gives out tickets and demerits for speeding to those children riding bikes and driving the plastic cars. Alice, a child from the toddler room, drives right by Donna and doesn't stop as Donna pretends to be the police officer. Harriet drives by, stops and looks at Donna with a puzzled frown. Donna says, "How fast were you going? That'll be $65.00 please!" Harriet suddenly smiles and laughs. It seems she's caught onto the game now but Alice just continues to drive by. (Field notes, August 15, 1996)

Although this is a spontaneous act on Donna's part, it has an effect on the play of children as Harriet eventually makes a connection to the adult in symbolic play. As well, several days later, the word "policeman" shows up in the toddlers' play as one child refers to himself as "the big policeman [who's] thirsty" and "I'm waiting for the Alice policeman" (August 20, 1996). Clearly, the mediation of the adult as the one who introduces play scenarios is an important aspect of the movement of children into symbolic play that brings the larger world into focus. This playful attitude and interaction demonstrate the adult role of co-creator. I would like to suggest a connection here as well

to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978) in which the adult provides as part of the co-creator role, the keys to shared meaning in our society. Consequently, the child also takes a role as co-creator, as she picks up on the cue of the adult and becomes complicit in the play episode.

Preschoolers

The preschoolers, having previously learned something about routines, can concentrate now on relationships. A sense of self is emerging in play as they learn that they can run, jump, build and that they can do all of this in relationship with others. Just as in kindergarten, socio-dramatic play, a cognitive developmental stage of play (Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998) is much in evidence. But co-operative play may not be "automatic" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) since children need an adult coach to help them develop the social skills required for successful group ventures. Parten describes the stages of social play as progressing from solitary to parallel to associative and finally co-operative (Frost & Klein, 1979). The nature of children's play changes as children's social skills develop. As I observe preschoolers in the day care setting, I can affirm that this is indeed the case. Children mature into a co-operative stage of play as they are able to sustain friendships. In a day care setting, this development is fairly obvious since children may be three to five years of age in a preschool room.

And so they become the master builders, manipulating materials through time and space and working hard. Constructional play is much in evidence. The play is physically demanding and includes swinging on the monkey bars, digging up the sand and transporting it across the play yard, jumping from the top of the climber, as well as

managing the play of themselves and others. Adults/teachers here become the facilitators, extending the play as they question and provide materials. Their mediation roles are largely devoted to helping children problem solve conflicts. Generally children enter the symbolic world of play quite well on their own but require teachers to be co-creators to support their choices. As in this example, adults become the questioners and listeners, a supportive role, with children taking the lead and developing the narrative and the play themselves.

> Outside, four boys are digging in the sand. "But we have to dig up wet sand," they are saying. "We have to make a big volcano,"says one. They are mounding the sand they dig it up and put it into the wagon. One is pounding the sand down flat and saying, "We need a hundred." When the wagon is fairly full, they start pulling and dragging it from near the climber over to the other side of the playground. This is a laborious task and it takes them a lot of time and effort, with at least three of them pushing and pulling to move the wagon. They empty the sand out by turning the wagon on its side and start mounding the sand to make a volcano-like structure. Eventually all the boys leave except for one who continues to pile up the sand and pat it down. An adult helps. He mounds the sand and the adult keeps digging. He makes a hole in the middle of the mound and with his hand pretends to drive on the mountain. He makes

> a tunnel and a cave on the side and says, "Lava runs down the side". The boy and the adult continue chatting about the work for a while and I ask, "Have you ever seen a volcano?" to which he replies, "Only in pictures." (Field notes, August 9, 1996)

The adult's role here is to support the play with materials (shovels, wagon) and to help in the play as directed to by the child. Clearly, the boys have learned that co-operation is a prerequisite of successful experience as they struggle together to move the sand to an appropriate location for the volcano. However, this is still in process, since only one child continues a group initiated task. The boys are demonstrating that they are beginning to understand the importance of relationships in play and about the need for a play partner(s) to extend and enhance the experience.

Grade One

Play in the elementary classroom begins to change shape, begins to be less obviously present. It requires digging in the seams a bit to find the richness of children's play. Grade one seems to be a transitional year within these groups. Play is still very much a part of learning, but often is play arising from the teacher's structuring of the environment to meet the requirements of the program of studies and not necessarily arising from the child's choice of experiences. Still there are many instances of co-operative play, which seems an important focus in grade one. It is a time for learning to learn with someone else and learning to adjust to someone else's agenda, but perhaps not always successfully. The following example illustrates how children play with concepts.

> Several math bins are provided and children are assigned in groups of 4 or 5. The decision is made prior to class by the teacher. Each group goes to every bin on a rotation basis throughout a two or three week time period. One game is a penny game played like Hi-Q or Chinese checkers. They move pennies around on the board quickly trying to get the last penny off the board. The boy in this group of girls swirls the pennies around in the bucket. The girls say "Don't." " I know two moves," he says, "I have a plan. I do this and if you jump over and you go like this and jump over ... and then that could be the last guy off." "How many do you got?" asks one of the girls. The boy then talks about the tooth fairy. The game proceeds and he says, "We're not going to make it" as he counts by 5s. "Look how fat I am," he says, " I ate all my pennies". They're stuffed under his shirt. The girls are focused on the game and one says, "That's the one that's not supposed to be there." The game continues. (May 7, 1996)

There is still tremendous freedom for children in terms of the choices they can make and the ways they can interact with materials, but the materials are selected by the teacher because of the requirement of a program of studies. Opportunities to explore and experiment with language and words and math concepts are provided in selected math bins. The children are active and can shape the agenda and move in the direction that

learning takes them. They are still playing within the boundaries of a structured collection of materials which have been chosen to support the concepts mandated in the program of studies. However, the materials remain open ended enough to support children's creativity and specific needs.

Playful attitudes are important in this classroom and permit the speculation and theorizing that is a play in itself. As they play with ideas they are considering the "what if" scenario so crucial to developing a questioning attitude to learning. In my observations, I gain a sense that there is a collaboration here between child and child, between teacher and children and between child and researcher at times. I am drawn easily into the classroom dynamic. Rankin (1997) discusses collaboration within the Reggio Emilia movement in this way.

> This mutuality includes a sense of reciprocity and community among participants in which different partners take the lead at different times and influence each other in a reciprocal process....As a result, people become interdependent, social relations deepen, and new structures emerge. (p. 72)

This sense of reciprocity and community could not exist as freely in the classroom setting without that sense of play that seems to be a vital part of the learning process here. In other words, it is the play which promotes and sustains the collaborative relationship in this grade one classroom. The following example illustrates the importance of play as providing the opportunity for collaborative learning.

Previously, one child brought tulips to school and the class began a conversation

about tulips. It is now some days later and still the children are talking about tulips as the afternoon starts. The teacher tries to move the children to a new topic.

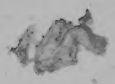
> "We're going to talk more about plants this week," says the teacher. There are continuing questions and discussion despite the shift of topics to pictures of the outside. One child says, "They do need the root," referring to the tulip and the earlier discussion about what tulips need to live. They keep coming back to tulips with their questions and comments and through it all, the teacher listens patiently. Another child wonders out loud about the "stickies" on the trees and discussion continues. The teacher appears to decide to turn this into a science opportunity since they are so focused on the tulips and what happens to them. They decide to take out their science books and draw before and after pictures of the tulip according to what they saw when the tulip had been left in the dark in the glass without water over the weekend. "What would the tulip look like?" [if it was like the tulip that had been left in the glass without water] asks the teacher and they begin to draw the tulip as they remembered it. I know she is wanting to move to her scheduled math lesson but they capture this moment together. (May 27, 1996)

Thus, the children have shaped the course of the afternoon's content and the teacher has been a co-creator in her willingness to follow their lead. The children's sense of wonder and their play with ideas is speculative and I sense they have a playful sense of knowing what is appropriate for their own learning right now. Play takes a new form for me as I observe a much more subtle example of play in the seams.

Play is definitely group oriented and relationships are firmly developed or rejected. The following two examples of math bin time point to the differences in the types of play seen in this classroom.

One group is working with a large cardboard sheet on which there are numbers and a bag of coins.

> One child says, "I don't know what to do" and gets up to go and see another child in the room. The boy dumps the coins out of the bag, moves them around on the carpet and finally starts putting coins on the large board. He sings a tuneless/toneless song as he works. The girl says nothing, but she also puts coins on the board. Soon the one-cent row of the board is filled up. I ask, "Are there enough coins for the board?" They answer, "Maybe, maybe not." They put a five-cent coin on the twenty five-cent coin space and seeing that it doesn't fit, take it off again. The girl has a collection of five-cent pieces and puts it all down first, then starts on the ten-cent pieces. They have more coins than spaces. "Let's start all over again," says the boy. The girl says,



"Why do we have to?" No answer. She repeats the question. "Fun," he says, "Don't you think so?" (May 15, 1996)

There is no relationship here between the players, since each is focused on his or her own agenda. There is very little communication and although they manipulate the materials in a similar fashion, their play could be categorized as parallel rather than co-operative or even associative (Monighan-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn & Almy, 1987). They play beside each other, they use the same materials but they do not interact. I sense that a deeper relationship between these players is not considered by either and they are bound together in play only by the math bin and the time and space of the day. Contrast this example with the following to understand the effect of a relationship on play. The math bin is the same one -- children have a large board and a bag of coins -- but the play, because of the relationships in the group, is very different and becomes more complex and co-operative.

"Let's play bank -- you flip up the money you want to get," says one child. Another child says, "Sorry, you have to get in line, back of the line Mister." The banker takes the money off the board, saying, "Thank you" and "Bye, bye." One child says, "What can I get out of this?" referring to a card that has 62 cents printed on it. The reply is 62. The banker says, " I counted it up," referring to the coins he has given to the customer, who disagrees. I'm puzzled. Does he want to count it up a different way, using different coins?

> Yes, that seems to be the answer because next he says, "Why don't you just give me 25 cents?" [coins]. The teacher comes by and the banker explains he is the manager. Another customer says, "I'm in a hurry back here, I have to go to work" and a third customer later says, "You have to give me interest," and returns the money he gave her so he can give her more. The money cards become credit cards. One customer steals everything and the manager is phoning the police. (May 14,1996)

These two examples clearly illustrate the possibility for complex play if a relationship exists among the players. If the players are able to participate in co-operative and socio-dramatic play, then they are able to display a deeper understanding of the world. Their ventures become more collaborative, with the result that they are able to play through their learning about the world in which they live. The complexity of the play narrative allows them to use their knowledge from the math program of studies, working with coins, in very real and meaningful contexts. Instead of practice of a skill, they approach utilization in the real world.

Grade Two

As children continue on their pathways to academic learning in a school system, the opportunities for play may be less available. However, when there is no time to play, grade twos create time and space within the circle of another activity. In fact the play becomes subversive activity. If there is no opportunit scheduled for free exploration or

play, children will work it in somehow as illustrated in this example. The children are engaged in a paperwork activity at their desks, cutting and gluing as they practice a concept in math. All of the children in the room are engaged in the same activity and the teacher has requested that they do so quietly. These two girls are working on the activity but their play as they do so is interesting.

> Kelly seems to be the mom and Karen is the little girl who uses a baby voice. She calls, "Mommy" and Kelly helps her get her scissors, asks to borrow scissors for her, adjusts her sweater and buttons it up. Finally, one of the boys brings the scissors over to her. Kelly says "Here, honey, I'll help you" and gets her started. Kelly then continues her own work but comes over later to supervise, pats Karen on the head and hugs her." (May 9, 1996)

The girls have used play to mediate a teacher directed task. In this way, they make the activity their own, superimposing play over the top of it. They are finding a spot for play and getting through a transition by using play to make it more interesting to them. Perhaps they are continuing their play from another time and space (likely recess). Does this help them gain control over the activity? Does it help them move smoothly through the activity? I suspect so, since they accomplish all they need to do. At the same time, they are demonstrating an ethic of caring as described by Noddings (1984) and explained by Grumet (1988) as being "situated in concrete relations" (p. 178). Although, Grumet's spin on this is largely meant for a feminist and adult audience, I believe that the play of caring felt here in childhood as these two children demonstrate a contextual relationship

also helps them to find a spot for themselves in this activity.

Because of the unique nature of this particular classroom, it would not be appropriate to make a judgment about the lack of play except to say that children create their own play possibilities. In this setting, the teacher was not able to provide the opportunities for socio-dramatic or co-operative play within the classroom. Her contributions to play as a co-creator were limited to supporting their play as they functionally experimented with words and with concepts. The children are observers of life and recreate life in their play episodes. The content of their classroom learning and their interests appears in their play. Perhaps they are trying out their ideas or deepening their understanding of concepts. The secure relationships that I sense existing between and among some of these players is evident on the playground. There is a group that plays horses on a regular basis. Their play is organized, co-operative and has rules, entirely appropriate for this age group (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Outside at recess, the children team up. One person in each team holds a skipping rope by both ends and one person in each team stands inside the skipping rope as the horse. The skipping ropes are the reins and are used by the drivers to control the activity of the game. The horses run with the drivers following behind.

> The horses are busy again. They say that they can't have too many people inside the ropes. They're poised on top of the hill and seem to be watching two teenagers crossing the hill. Suddenly, Kiera snaps the reins, Ken begins to run -- Is this a chase game I wonder as I watch them? They run around the perimeter of the field and eventually she reins

him in. (May 22, 1996)

The horse theme emerged later in Kiera's project and could be seen as a sustained interest, played out in her recreations on the playground and in her self selected topic. Play seems to be appearing in the spaces as this takes place at recess and in an individual research topic but outside the regular rhythm of the classroom routine. Other than her project presentation, there is really no mention of horses, other than the recess game, during the times I am observing. I find it interesting that her interest in horses can be part of play at recess but does not appear in the classroom until she introduces it on an individual basis. Had I not seen it during recess, I would have been very surprised by her choice of topic.

This leads to all kinds of speculation about this student's perception of what and where it is appropriate to display her learning interest. It appears to be appropriate when she can control the agenda (her presentation), but not in general classroom discussion. I wonder, then, how many times I've missed valuable information about children's interests because I did not create enough space for them in the classroom or somehow, children perceived a separation of classroom learning and their personal interests in learning. In contrast with the episode of the tulips in grade one, it seems incredible that by grade two, children are no longer freely sharing their learning interests. Of course, there are many complex reasons why this is so, particularly given the difficult year these children have had. Nevertheless, I am still struck by such a stark contrast.

All of these examples of play throughout the four sites do provide a brief glimpse of what play is like and, consequently, what learning is like for the children in each environment. Each group experience is unique and each individual's experience within

the group is also unique. However, it is possible to see trends for each group. Toddlers are learning about routines; preschoolers are developing relationships; five year olds are becoming members of a literate society; six year olds in grade one are still active agents in their own stories; and children in grade two play in the seams, becoming subversives in order to play out their learning. To go deeper into the tunnels and to drill deeper into the rock of the walls requires more discussion of play but in a slightly different vein. In the next chapter, I wish to continue talking about play as I provide a bridge for you into the discussion about curriculum.

Chapter Six
Chipping away at the Ore: Play

As I began to think about what play was like in each of these settings, there were some themes that arose which I feel cross the boundaries of the research sites; in other words, these were themes which linked all the sites within an early childhood framework. However, sometimes themes arose which pointed to differences in the sites; these differences appeared to create boundaries between the sites. Sometimes a theme was replayed from a different angle in one site as compared to another. Sometimes a theme stood out because it clearly did not exist in more than one site. This prompted me to think about the metaphor of mining and to see this as the reflection of light glinting on the gold. But it didn't seem satisfying enough as a metaphor. As I thought more about these themes, I began to see the children's play through the metaphor of a prism. Just as a prism refracts light and illuminates many different points of light, so too does the play in these four sites. I believe that I am able to see something different each time I turn the play to a different angle. This can be both frustrating and rewarding. What follows is another turning to the light of this prism I call play.

A time and space for play

One of the most fascinating themes to me is the issue of time and space, both physical and psychological. The provision of physical space is fairly obvious but we tend to forget that psychological space, the opportunity to be actively engaged or to be heard, is just as important. It is difficult to separate time and space, since the provision of one is so closely connected to the provision of the other. However, I have somewhat arbitrarily disconnected them in the following sections.

Who owns time?

Time is a precious commodity -- a cliche that seems trite when written here but definitely the motto in the grade two classroom. The children were adjusting to a new teacher after several substitutes throughout the school year. The teacher, assigned to this group in the last part of the year was very aware of the passage of time. She talked about time often, to the children and also to me during the interview. She labeled time as "my time" and "your time". This boundary affected the playful quality of the classroom atmosphere. There was always a rush to finish, to cover more work, to complete a Mad Minute math test. Often there was a schedule posted and the teacher would use phrases like "You're wasting your time" (May 7,1996) as they lined up for gym. Gym time was their time, math time was her time. Time belonged to the teacher when it was work time or learning time and to the students when it was time for gym, recess or lunch.

As a consequence, there seemed to be an understanding that play was something students did during their time, in the gym or at recess. Work was clearly disconnected from play. This segregation of time associates the work aspect of school with teacher ownership. Do only teachers feel responsible for the work of school? If this is indeed the case, and I suspect it is for many teachers as they shoulder the burden of accountability in a public system, the responsibility of learning then falls primarily on the teacher and not the student. Intrinsic motivation is a necessary component of learning. Indeed, "children will act simply to understand " (Schickedanz, Schickedanz, Forsyth & Forsyth, 1998, p.20). But if children do not own the responsibility, then they can not be held accountable for their own learning. To shift all of the responsibility onto teachers by separating time issues on the basis of work and play seems to me to be creating a false

dichotomy and denying the intrinsic motivation for work and play inherent in children's learning. Work and play may be mutually exclusive if we define both using control as the dividing line but Klein, Kantor and Fernie (1988) and King (1983) also remind us that both work and play may still be enjoyable. If this is the case, then children may be intrinsically motivated to do both since it is the intrinsic feedback which reinforces the activity (Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998).

It is quite probable that this teacher felt enormous pressure to ready students for the end of the year. She knew that the children had been in turmoil for several months. Classroom learning and the expected appropriate classroom behaviours had been negatively affected by the constant change of substitute teachers. The external pressure of preparing the children to meet the objectives for grade two seems to be her motivation. In an interview, she states quite clearly that she has had to adjust her views on what classroom experience should be like, in response to this particular group of children. Her philosophy of teaching and learning is being affected.

> I tried to make learning hands on as much as possible, but with this group it's very difficult. They do not work well in groups. Paired work is very difficult for them, even working with just one other individual is very difficult for them to do. So my wish is that we could do more of that, could do more paired reading, do more paired math games, but it's very difficult. Chaos can arise very quickly. (May 1996)

The teacher in this grade two class speaks of her frustration and concern for the welfare

of the children and her worry about "trying to get them through their math curriculum." She is very aware that "they've had a lot thrown at them." What is occurring here is perhaps deeper than just "trying to get them through." Perhaps, the relationship is not strong enough here yet to permit a more collaborative learning in a play based environment. Beck (1973) warned us long ago about the danger of trying to push children too fast.

> Maturation is a slow process. A fact that does not sit well with our impatient times -- times which have such technical know-how of speeding up processes. Pressure cooker methods applied to live children may backfire badly. (p. 7)

This teacher clearly feels pressured and in turn the children may also feel pressured; thus, they do not react well to the teacher's management strategies as she attempts to cover all that must be learned by the end of the year. The pressure, I feel, lies in the separation of work and play thus resulting in the separation of time and responsibility. It is the perception of the constraints of external pressures that moves these participants, both children and teacher, away from being co-creators in the classroom. The responsibility is lopsided. However, given this particular situation, this teacher's care and concern for the children's welfare must surely be an important factor in this relationship.

Playing in the seams

Given the relegation of play to recess, lunch or gym time, one would expect no play to occur during school learning hours, at least not the significant and complex play seen as learning. Christie and Wardle (1992) postulate that such play requires at least thirty minutes. Children require time to move beyond the initial stage of exploration and

survey of materials into a rhythm that permits deeper involvement in play narratives. Where there is no room for play in the elementary school classroom (certainly not an unusual situation in a grade two classroom) it likely takes on a different appearance, such as the mother - baby play that took place during a seatwork activity in the grade two class. One child became the mother and the other the baby as they worked at cutting and gluing. The roles of mother and baby that the two girls took on represents children finding an opportunity to play despite the demands of a busy school schedule. Will they play despite our control of their learning and play? It seems so. Perhaps this kind of play is another way to define their relationship, to demonstrate that ethic of caring (Noddings, 1984) that seems such a pivotal part of this kind of interaction. Other indications that play takes on a different appearance or function are evident in the children's approach to a brainstorming activity for language arts. In response to a sentence starter, the children provided responses too numerous to list here in detail. What follows is an excerpt from that session.

> There are lots of hands up for this and they appear to be actively engaged in this activity. For the starter sentence, "As tall as," they said, "tower, sky, earth, 10,000 houses, 49,000 men, building, castle, [S]tatue of [L]iberty, (discussion about what this is), skyscrapers (he originally said infinity), elephants" and so on. (May, 1996)

Similarly, other sentence starters provoked similar original and playful kinds of words. Clearly, these children are used to playing with words and ideas. Can this be another form of functional play? Do children intellectually, instead of physically, turn words

around and peer at them, shake them and play with them? What is missing, of course, is the element of choice that characterizes play; but perhaps the children are creating a space for play through the playful attitude that they present during this activity designed by the teacher. They are mediating a work experience. Such classroom play is from a deeper level, from a vein of learning that is buried within the classroom context. The obvious kinds of socio-dramatic play are seen at recess, where children are recreating the understanding of concepts and/or interests. But here it is as if they are playing with what seems like codes. I am struck by the fact that there is something happening which I don't completely understand. In a sense the usual roles of adult and child have been suspended. Instead of the child experiencing an adult, unknown world, through language, which Davies says is "external and inevitable, and indeed, in some cases, necessary for survival" (1982, p. 28), I am the one located outside the circle of understanding. I am the one without the power.

The sense that there is play with codes began to tug at me when I started rereading field notes and found phrases for which I didn't have a context or frame for understanding. I choose to call them codes since to me they represent information which I have yet to decode. For example, someone brings a snack, a banana, and one of the children refers to it as "unidentified flying banana" and no one but me finds this unusual. In fact, my question about it disturbed the rhythm of their activity. Someone else uses "Super Lips" on his mother's day card and another child says "national small fry...this is national small fry speaking" (May 14) and "no carnage in the skies" (May 15) as he goes outside to play. Obviously this is sparked by television or some media event; but, they are on the inside, I'm on the outside. They all are complicit in their understanding. I'm not. I

am fascinated by this type of play in the grade two class. Are they creating their own language of play, separate from the adult control of schooling? Can they use it to create their own space and control in this environment? Another dissertation topic surely.

Creating space and time to play

When children and teachers in elementary schools are constrained by a prescribed curriculum, play can become an underutilized medium for learning. I have stated earlier that children will play in the seams of classroom life; in fact, they will create a time and space to play during what teachers might call a lesson or work time. In this sense, play might be seen as the way in which children process a learning opportunity and this type of play takes on different form depending on the context. Sometimes play can be created within the parameters of required concepts, if a more open-ended approach is utilized. The math bins in grade one provide an example of academic play (Christie, 1991) since it is initially designed by the teacher. However, it is the resulting interaction with materials which is not always what the teacher expects that could be called a form of play. Children organize their own response to the materials and it is possible to meet the requirements of a program of studies while providing some choice and play for children as learners. The previous grade one example of the bank also provides a clear example of how a teacher's intentions, if materials are open-ended, can be surpassed by the children through play.

Children use socio-dramatic play to make sense of what they see in the world around them, such as trips to the store, to the bank, to the gas station and so on. They replay what they have seen as they become bank tellers in grade one. Preschoolers in day care gas up the car just as they have seen others do. Children try to make sense of the roles in society by playing out the responsibilities. The firefighter in kindergarten and the

teacher game in grade one are other examples. Children maneuver the time and space of an open-ended lesson activity to fill in their own need to play with concepts and play through to an understanding of concepts. The response of children to the materials provided by the teacher may not match the intentions of the activity. Thus, as children collaborate and become active agents through their play in the classroom, they are creating a time and space to play. The responses in play or playful attitudes are not within the control of the teacher.

Time and space

In three of the settings observed, play is obvious and time and space are both physically and psychologically provided. What is the difference between the physical provision of space and the psychological provision of space? I have described psychological space as the opportunity to be heard or to be actively engaged. But it is more than that. At this time, a catchy phrase to sum up my sense of this concept eludes me and so I am using the term psychological space to refer to the sense of emotional space so critical to children's development. Just as space is physically provided to encourage children to take on control of their learning through play, so is space needed which allows the freedom to make decisions during play. Also, there is an understanding of what is developmentally appropriate for children in this psychological space. I find this hard to define, primarily because there is a paradox here. Children need the space to expand and make decisions on their own, yet they need an adult to scaffold, to facilitate and to support their play. In the discussion that follows, physical space, psychological space and time seem important aspects to consider.

In the day care, toddlers and preschoolers have long stretches of time in which to pursue play themes. They are restricted only by the boundaries of routine times such as meals, naps, arrival and departure, and by the limits of their interactions with the physical space. Time and space here are physically provided, or scheduled, and psychologically provided. The term psychologically provided here refers to the attitude and philosophies of the adults who step back and encourage children to take control in their own play. Some children in day care may arrive at the centre at 7:30 a.m. and not leave till 5:30 p.m. This differs from a school setting in kindergarten which is usually a 2 and 1/2-hour day or a grade one or two day which is usually begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:15 p.m. Because of the length of day a child might be in day care, planning takes on a critical role in the provision of space and time. The current debate in day care is focused on whether or not early childhood professionals are providing care or education. The ramifications of a care program and its intended philosophy spring more from an orientation that children are there to be cared for but not necessarily educated. Although care is still an important component of this particular day care centre, there is also a philosophy which recognizes the impossibility of separating care and education. Learning is enhanced and supported in an environment that focuses on time and space for play. Choice is understood as an important contribution to learning. Staff write messages for parents about the day's plan using the word "may" instead of "will" so that children's choices are not prescribed by adult planning. As well, the placing of the words on the board indicated an approach that was not linear and opened the reader to the possibilities rather than a prescribed plan for the day.

Today we may:

lazy blocks water and containers

connect

toy people

paper/markers tractor and trailers

say Happy Leaving to Terri

make a cake

The schedule for the day is loosely organized and includes play in outdoor as well as indoor venues and in all areas of the room. Sometimes play happens in spaces that are created by children and adults together, as in this example.

> One of the children and his family have been to the Fringe and have seen the spider woman. The children in this room (preschool) decide to recreate the spider woman and use the newspaper clipping that someone brought in as a guide. An easy chair is extended with blocks as if they are stairs leading up to the chair. Black arms and legs have been spread out over a blanket on the chair to give the illusion that there is no human body. Children take turns standing behind the chair and pretending to be the spider. The staff provided the space in the centre of the room to set this up, searched through cupboards for a blanket and found black material suitable for the legs and arms, all the while, using questions and discussion to extend the set up and facilitate

the play. (May 22, 1996).

This is an example of an adult who contributes to the play initiated by the child, based on his experience and his desire to replay an incident. This replaying allows him to process the experience and understand it. In responding to the child's play, the adult takes on a facilitating role (Cherry, 1976) in providing for play, which is adult anticipated but child initiated, and so becomes a co-creator of the play. It is the adult's understanding of developmentally appropriate practice that fosters the creation of a psychological space for play -- a commitment to the child's control of the play -- and to the creation of the physical requirements of the play -- materials, space in the classroom and support of the ideas.

The kindergarten program is the bridge across which children begin to understand the differentiation of time and space in terms of a work orientation rather than a play orientation. Monighan-Nourot, Scales and Van Hoorn (1987) have studied play as the bridge for teachers to link theory and practice. But play in kindergarten, while still largely under their control, is extended as a bridge for children as they come to know what is expected in different contexts. Teacher-directed opportunities for play begin to shape expected classroom behaviours.

Time and space are still critical during the kindergarten year. Play and learning are still seen as linked. However, the teacher is aware of what is coming next and begins to prepare children for a more structured sense of time. Group time is introduced as a more formal learning part of the day. Children may still see this as enjoyable and playful even thought they do not control the play themselves. The boundaries of time here are laid out in the differentiation of expected behaviour during group time and self-selected

time as well as the varied learning experiences that occur.

> The teacher says, "Listening time now please" and starts to talk about the book, the cover and then turns to the inside to the title of the chapter and says, "This word right here says 'spring'." There is some discussion regarding spring and the attention of some of the children wanders. Gerry is moved closer to the teacher because he was tracing the block pattern on the wall and shuffling about. (April 10, 1992)

In the past, I reflected a great deal on this particular incident since it was an epiphany for me concerning the conflicting messages about expectations we give to children in schools. Time seems to be shifting here as children learn that at certain times of the kindergarten day, they must alter their behaviour to fit the adult's expectation. This was not the case during the self selected times during which they chose the play. For some children this message about time may create a conflict. But I am largely stuck by the resiliency of children as they adapt to contextual limitations. Space is also delineated this way -- there is now a group meeting space made obvious in the partitioning in the room, and children attend to different expectations in this classroom space and in other spaces in the school. Kindergarten children now must adjust their activity to suit the agenda of another person, usually an adult. Time and space for play become slightly more limited and there are subtle changes in the routines to encourage the socialization of children to a school setting.

Many day care centres have a group meeting space; however, it is not usually an

expectation that toddlers will be able to accept a limitation of their activity by sitting in circle for a group time. Space and time are constrained only by the routine requirements of laying out cots for sleeping, setting up a table space for eating, finding a comfortable environment for diapering, and meeting the physical and safety needs of young children. These are generally seen as part of the physical provision of space. The following example reflects this.

> It is lunchtime and the staff sit with the children at a small table in the centre of the room. The tables are round and the cots are out in the rest of the room since children will begin napping after lunch. Adults eat lunch as well and help children as needed, but children can attempt to pour their own juice from small pitchers....There is a lot of chatter and conversation at the tables. One caregiver assists children to sit closer to the table and another pours milk for someone....Some children leave the table and put their dishes on the food cart....Another caregiver helps a child to serve herself. One little girl comes over to the cots with a white plastic cup in her hand. A caregiver comes over to put up the board temporarily separating the sleeping area from the lunch area. (August 6, 1996)

In this example it is possible to see that adults are providing children with the psychological space to be independent eaters. They also manage the physical space to accommodate children's needs -- space to sleep, space at the table to eat and so on.

However, it is the facilitation aspect of their work that intrigues me. So often adults help children by doing things for them instead of with them. Here, in this example of toddlers eating lunch, adults are present and attentive but still foster independence. This exhibits respect for children and creates psychological space -- room for children to exercise control over a functional routine.

As we consider the provision of time and space for play, we see that the limits of the expectations of a school-based program make providing play a little more challenging. Sometimes children and teachers must deal with the dichotomous messages inherent in balancing children's sense of control over time and space in play with the demands of the socialization of children to the adult world. However, children take more responsibility for creating play underneath the classroom curriculum and see possibilities which are not apparent to adults. Play is in a deeper space, perhaps less accessible to the adults. It may be that children can then maintain more control over play if adults have less access. In a kindergarten or day care program where play is the primary medium for learning, time and space are both psychologically and physically provided. As adults provide time and space for play, they become facilitators, participants and observers (Cherry, 1976). As they do so, they become involved in a relationship with children as players. This relationship is built upon the teacher's understanding of developmentally appropriate practice which permits a commitment to the sharing of power. Children can control the direction of their play and thus the direction of their learning. The teacher displays an attitude which confirms and affirms the children's control. Ultimately, this is what being a co-creator is all about. Once the psychological provision of time and space is understood as flowing from attitude, then the physical

provision of space can be seen as the action which flows from this viewpoint. If physical space is provided but not psychological space, I suspect that there is no commitment, nor relationship, nor sharing of power. There is no act of co-creation.

Despite the differences in how adults provide time and space in the four sites, children still actively engage in some form of play. Play may occur on the surface and be easily recognized or play may be underground and less accessible to the adults. Even pushed underground as in the school settings, play is still an integral part of the learning process. In a way, play is a subversive activity (with apologies to Postman). Even if time and space are not provided in a manner which would accommodate children's needs, there is still gold in the play in these seams. It doesn't matter that we have to dig for it a little deeper into the mine tunnels. The important point is that play is still present.

Choices

Children identify play as being when they choose what they are doing. If the activity is assigned by some one else, an adult, or controlled by others, children are more likely to label it as work (Klein, Kantor & Fernie, 1988; King, 1983). Given that definition, it is likely that children would not identify what they are doing in elementary classrooms as play, since they have little choice. Children in the day care and in the kindergarten classroom would likely indicate that they were indeed playing, since the provision of materials, time and space generally serves children's need to control their own play. Choices enable the play to be richer and more varied. Narratives grow and develop and become examples of children deepening their understanding of concepts. If choices are available with enough open-ended materials or "loose parts" (Jones, 1989) to

support the play, then the narrative is extended and reveals the child's thinking as in this case.

> Back in the house, one child is directing imaginary friends to appropriate places. Alice says, "We have no tea. I've got coffee. Oh my friends are here now" (Mr. Bear and Bunky, two of the circle time stuffed animals are brought to the house by another child). The stuffed animals are placed on the blanket that is laid out in the middle of the floor in the house. Alice counts the number of friends and says, "Pretend we had a party now." The table is set as well and all of the dishes and pots and pans and every movable prop in the house is set out. Miss Fisher arrives and the girls tell her, "We're having a party with boy friends and girl friends." There is more food in the house and the girls put that out too. Alice removes her apron and decides to dress the baby all the while explaining her every move to the teacher. (March 16, 1992)

When choice is part of the learning experience, children take play into unexpected areas, often unknown to adults. A tea party is a common kindergarten play event but it is the narrative that is woven through materials and time and space in the context of choices that makes it such a rich experience, different from every other tea party ever held, open to possibilities of playing out experience. Alice can switch from tea party to child care and still maintain the frame of tea party as part of her plot.

The choices toddlers make are connected to how they perceive the routines of life. In the day care centre, it seems when one routine finishes another starts. Routines take a little longer at this age since the children are heavily dependent on an adult to help them internalize the routine. Adults see routines as transition but children do not recognize this distinction. For children, play happens as often during a transition time as in a planned activity time. For children, play is seamless. There are still choices to be made. Because the adults are focused on the routines, they see children playing instead of waiting. I suspect that from the child's point of view, there is a different perception of time. The following example illustrates how children react to a routine.

> Harriet is still being carried by the caregiver, who is singing a song with the children's names in it as they all get their ziploc bags out of the cubbies near the door. They are gathering near the outside door. Hats? Are they going outside? Yes! Meanwhile another caregiver continues to tidy the block and construction corner. Hal is expressing that he doesn't want to put sunscreen on like everyone else. "No sunscreen" and he seems angry. While everyone is getting ready to go outside, the little one at the water table is still there. She seems to have been there the entire time that I have watched today. (August 2, 1996)

The adult is accepting a responsibility to clean up. In doing so, she accepts that the play choices toddlers make do not always include cleaning up. In fact, toddlers may flit from one to space to another without cleaning up after themselves. For these children the play

moves from inside to outside easily because the adult has assisted with the transition.

Developmentally, toddlers may not understand the concept of "clean up", "play", "clean up", "play" and so on. For them the choices they make are based on the proximity of materials; thus, the caregiver cleans up in this situation so that children can have access to the materials again when they return and the play for the children remains seamless, merely shifting venues. "Time schedules are flexible and smooth,"(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.84). The routine of preparing to go outside is still filled with choice within the limits of safety (wearing sunscreen) and the time boundaries. Eventually, the little one who continues to play in the water goes outside, but she is not hurried and makes her own choices about the play which occupies her attention. What is fascinating is the child's ability to continue to focus on her own satisfying agenda, regardless of the obvious transition taking place within the room and supported by the adults as they make the transition flexible.

Toddlers are playing with the routines of life. Their functional play is often focused on dumping, filling and dumping. Perhaps playing with a shovel or spoon in the sand is a rerun of holding a spoon at lunch, a rehearsal of the skills required for the routine of eating as might be the case in this example.

> Sally has previously filled the sand pail and is now patting the top. She picks up a small rock and is looking at it quite closely. She runs all her fingers through the sand. She lifts up the sifter to a distance even with her eyes, empties it by turning it upside down. She digs in the sand with the shovel and puts the sand in the pail until it is full. She smooths the

top of the sand with her hand and then takes the pail and

dumps it upside down. (August 14, 1996)

In choosing to dump, she is expressing her control over the experience. The choice to play at this routine demonstrates a desire to learn, to explore, to rehearse. This is part of "logico-mathematical knowledge" (Wilson, 1986, p.127) that children use as they expand their understanding of the relationships of objects. There is also social knowledge implied in the rehearsal aspect of the utilization of the tool. Humans learn to use tools in this way. It ensures our survival. Other examples of rehearsal skills show up in the choices toddlers make about play experiences. Water play is sometimes the replay of washing objects, surfaces, or dolls -- another routine of life. The outdoor play with the plastic riding cars and gassing up is a socio-dramatic yet very functional kind of play, associated with a routine of life which is very important to children at this age. They are learning how the world works and they seem fascinated by the every day happenings that adults seem to take for granted.

As children enter the world of symbolic play, there is more evidence of choice in their selection of the narrative that develops. Because there is also more negotiation, there are more choices that must be made to ensure that play continues. The relationship becomes more important and is itself a choice that children make. As they grow older, children choose to play with others. For example, some of the possibilities for block play in the kindergarten room included motorcycles, watercraft, horses, and so forth. The players were required to negotiate how the overall context of the play would proceed and defend their choices as one child did in the following scenario.

John slowly dismounts, meanders over to Jeremy, looks

carefully at the broken horse, looks back at his own and says, "Your horse is a robot horse and my horse is a human horse. That's why your horse fell apart and mine didn't. "

(May 1, 1992)

The child rationalizes his own block building and explains the differences. The labeling of the horses takes the play to a different context. Rather than just creating a building, the child is choosing to assign a narrative structure to the play. Thus the play moves from functional exploration into the realm of the socio-dramatic. The door has been opened for a narrative of play to develop. As children in the preschool room of the day care or in the kindergarten are moving towards a highly complex form of socio-dramatic play, there appear to be many more choices to be made. This is evident in the complexity of the play episodes and the thinking they share about what happens in the narrative.

The choices in play contribute directly to the continuing development of intrinsic motivation in learning, since they arise from, and are sustained by, the individual as he or she negotiates experience. Intrinsic motivation is tied directly to the characteristics of play (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1987). A choice must be initiated, supported or rejected based on experience, both individually and in situations connected to other players. These are important life lessons learned by children at an early age. The opportunity to make a choice in learning is always appropriate but not always available to the learner. This early experience seems to me to be crucial since the child must become an intrinsically motivated learner quite quickly. The demands of later learning depend on selecting what to learn, incorporating that into schema and representing what you know so others will know you have learned. All of this can be achieved in play since, in play,

children learn to make choices. As the toddler plays with the choices of rehearsing a routine and the preschooler moves into more socio-dramatic play, it is the relationship of playing with people and objects that develops and supports the layering on of other learning.

Finding the End of this Seam

It has been a difficult choice to separate these two chapters on play. I see this interpretation of the play as a whole, as an experience that has many layers. I have attempted to describe the life in these classrooms and some of the emerging themes that hooked me. I am well aware that I give you only glimpses into the mineshaft based on my process of searching, picking and analyzing. In order to know what play is like, you must live out your own play life. My presentation here is simply what can be seen in the pool of light that emanates from the miner's hard hat, limited at best -- but intriguing enough, I hope, to send us deeper into the shaft.

It is difficult to separate play from curriculum since they are so closely related in my mind. Children are creating a curriculum for learning in their play. As they play with materials, ideas and concepts they are also creating a structure for investigating and for learning. In a sense, play is the what of a curricular experience, the content, and often the how.

I would like to be able to flow gently into the topic of curriculum, another of my previously identified frameworks, but this would become an even more intimidatingly long chapter. Only because of the appearance of space as a way of organizing this work into readable bites, I ask the reader to pretend that a chapter break does not really exist here and to flow with me over the page into an extended discussion of play and

curriculum.

Chapter Seven
Hauling the Ore Up and Out:
Curriculum

The discussion of curriculum is a deepening of the discussion about play. I have created an artificial boundary in the separation of play from curriculum. In fact play seems to me to be the surface of curriculum. It is the visible part of children's thinking. Most of my observations of children in play and early childhood settings have led me to the conclusion that play is what we see on the outside and curriculum, lived curriculum, is what is on the inside or below the surface. I find myself returning yet again to what emerged during my master's study. At that time, I was struck by the narratives of dramatic play as the source of curriculum and I mused that this was the form of curriculum – the lived experience. At that time, I postulated that the form of curriculum included "the sensory world of a body and a mind existing as a unified whole within an environment of others" (Brown, 1993, p. 114) which comes from classroom experience. Now I would add another descriptor since the search to understand this curricular lived experience has lead me deeper than I expected to go. The veins of this study, the gold in the seams, is actually what I would choose to call the curriculum as lived experiences of the children and the adults in these settings. As a teacher and a researcher, I face the difficult task of rationalizing my version of curriculum and the "designations [I] reserve for those accounts that contradict the current wisdom" (Grumet, 1988, p.168). It would be wonderful to neatly categorize play, curriculum and adult/child relationships as easily as I separated them for the conceptual framework of this study. In real life, it is not so simple.

What is the curriculum? In an elementary classroom, the response might be the

program of studies. Indeed, as I described earlier, that is primarily the definition that classroom teachers gave when I talked to them. In the day care classroom, likely the response would be a confused look since day care staff follow few mandated curriculum guides. In fact, the perception of the role of day cares as a site solely for the "care" of children might lead staff to reject the need for curriculum. It would be foolish to accept either position as the definitive answer, without probing the surface and digging down to the seams a little. It is in the seams of life in an early childhood setting that we find evidence that curriculum is what is happening day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. It is present in the questions, organization, discourse, and representations. It is specific and general and there is a sense of agenda.

In the formal environment of the elementary school, it is possible to see the effects of the implementation of a specific program of studies. Children learn to read, write, compute, and investigate within the frame of specific objectives and subject matter. This demonstration of learning can be represented through their interactions with materials, concepts and ideas that are provided or presented. But this is not the whole story, it is only the surface story. Children in kindergarten represent their agendas of learning about life, and the world, through the development of narratives in socio-dramatic play episodes. Toddlers and preschoolers present their learning in the replaying of routines, relationships and ideas in functional and symbolic play. In grades one and two, the play underneath the formal curriculum accomplishes the same end. What else are they learning in addition to math facts and language arts? They are learning about how the world works, how school works, and how they work as a group.

Relationships

Children in group settings, regardless of the setting, must learn how a group operates. Toddlers, developmentally still in the stage of egocentrism (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), prefer to play alone or in parallel situations but because of their placement within a group must learn to function within the group. Given what we know about development, the deliberate structuring of groups may seem to be fraught with conflict. However, children do need exposure to the social world. If our expectations of children in that social world are focused on the development of competent social interaction, some adjustment is needed so that those expectations match a developmentally appropriate goal. As adults, we need to be realistic about the degree of competence we expect from very young children. Group interaction is difficult and often disagreements are the result, as in this example.

> Sally is still playing in the sand, scooping, filling and dumping with her pail, shovel and sifter. Soon, another child approaches and plops down beside her in the sand area. The newcomer reaches over and takes the pail. Sally begins to cry -- loudly! And then she reaches for the pail. It appears that these two toddlers want the same play item but it looks like neither will let the other have it. A caregiver approaches with two other sand toys but the negotiation appears not to be successful. The other child leaves the area and Sally resumes her play with the sifter, shaking with both hands. (August 14, 1996)

Sally's rejection of the playmate and turn taking can be understood as developmentally appropriate. While she doesn't actually use the words, "no" and "mine", her intent is clear. She is playing with the toy and intends to continue. There is no room for turn taking and, through her loud objections, she is proclaiming ownership. Eventually toddlers learn that sometimes the words "no "and "mine" do not seem to get the desired results. But these disagreements are part of Erikson's (as cited in Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998) theories concerning the developing sense of independence and autonomy in conflict with the requirements of learning to be in a group. Eventually, the negotiation process established by the caregiver in this example will be successful. The groundwork has been laid.

Toddlers are generally at the stage Erikson identifies as Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt. The routines of centre life, and their participation in the routines, are indeed the curriculum for these toddlers. They learn to eat lunch when it is lunch time and sleep when it is nap time and are perhaps comforted by the reoccurrence of a routine that is steady and predictable (Wilson, 1986). In terms of their relationships with others, their participation is still limited. I would like to return to an example used in Chapter Four. It is possible to see that these toddlers are still coming to terms with being a friend as we look at an expanded description.

> There is a hockey game today. One of the tables is set up for hockey play with a blue "rink". Two children are playing there with an adult close by. Devon comes over and puts his truck on the hockey table. "No," screams a player and the problem solving activity begins. "Do you want to

take a man and play hockey too?" asks a caregiver. "No" he repeats. Is there a compromise? No, apparently not. "No the hockey sticks can go over there" he says but "the blue table is the ice," says the caregiver. (August 21, 1996)

Devon is not able to see the perspective of the other players yet, which is prerequisite to becoming a friend. For most children this age, friendship is based largely on proximity. The ability to develop a friendship and solve conflict depends on the ability to self-regulate emotionally (Katz & McClellan, 1997). As children gradually move further away from their egocentric pathways, friendships develop and thus we see preschoolers who are anxious to make and maintain relationships. They still have difficulty at times understanding the dynamics of a relationship, but friendships can be quite strong and influence behaviour as in this case.

Harriet is climbing up on the climber, right to the top. Hal says, "I can climb up too" and he follows her up, roaring like a lion. He's on his knees so he looks like a lion. A caregiver looks up and says, " Harriet and Hal, that centre is closed right now. " They leave this centre after some persuasion and regroup in the block area. They lift pieces of the large interlocking puzzle that covers the floor and then put them back down again. (August 8, 1996)

These two children have appeared inseparable throughout my observations. In my field notes play episodes which involves one of them usually involves the other. In fact, when it came time to leave the toddler room and move to the preschool room, both children

were moved together to make the transition easier.

Friendships are inherent in a socio-dramatic play experience, but it takes time for co-operative play to emerge because children are still learning what it takes to keep a friend. Through their play episodes, preschoolers are learning about this. It is the negative and positive interactions which reinforces this curriculum and strengthens the understanding.

> In one spot, Bill and Tyson are attempting to problem solve. At least Bill seems to be. He's talking to Tyson and seems to be explaining his position, "I want it too." There is a big ball involved and some disagreement about its use. Suddenly Tyson hits at Bill but misses. The hockey sticks they are carrying have become guns now. The adult moves in and makes some suggestions and soon the disagreement appears to be settled and they begin to play again with the big ball, although now it is more of a hockey game. Two problems solved with the help of an adult and some perseverance on Bill's part to continue the game. (August 14, 1996)

It is the role of the adult as mediator which supports these children as they learn about relationships. Because Bill was committed to playing with Tyson and because an adult mediator helped, these children were eventually able to move to a shared position, at least for a few moments of play. Emotional self-regulation is a critical part of the child's socialization to the adult world.

> From the caregiver's sensitive responses a child gradually learns to modify his emotions. To a large extent, children's emotion regulation patterns are well established, for better or worse, by the time they reach the preschool period. (Katz & McClellan, 1997, p.3)

The curriculum of relationships begins very early and is one which we, as adults with retrograde views, take for granted. Children work very hard to understand and emerge from egocentric viewpoints.

In kindergarten, children have learned a lot about relationships and how they work. What five-year-old at some point hasn't said, "I won't be your friend." This is an example of negative coercion, a way of expressing the desire to control the actions of another person. Same sex friendship is emerging rapidly although there are still examples of boy /girl interactions. They were rare in this kindergarten room, perhaps because the boys greatly outnumbered the girls. Even when they played together in the same space, the play centered on different themes, much to the annoyance of both boys and girls.

> The girls have returned to the block centre. They gather the small dinosaurs from around the centre and begin to play mothers and babies. As they are playing, one of the boys objects to their presence and tells them "You shouldn't come to play dinosaurs." Reluctantly he leaves their vicinity and they continue the play. The small dinosaurs are calling back to the large ones and soon two other boys join the girls. Big Foot and Long Neck take care of the babies

> so that Sharp Tooth doesn't get them. Alice takes the mother and baby over to a block constructed house. Jeremy threatens the mother and baby but Alice says, "Get out of my house this minute. Look I have sharp teeth" and the enemy dinosaur is vanquished. (March 20, 1992)

They are puzzled by a seeming lack of appropriate response as they see it -- the game should only be played one way, yet they are learning to co-exist as this play illustrates. It is the friendship, the relationship which enables the play. The content comes from shared experiences -- the children had likely seen a movie (*Land Before Time*) and were basing the play action on it. Boys and girls approached this play differently as the girls overlaid the play with a message about caring relationships of mother and baby. The boys' play was eventually much more aggressive. It is fascinating to note here the genderization of the play. The separation in play of boys and girls seems reflected in society, but surely there is no gene on which this is coded. The seeds of this social learning come early, obviously before kindergarten. Children learn from peers about what is culturally appropriate as well as from the adults who are caring for them (Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998). The socialization starts at birth but becomes very apparent in kindergarten.

On the playgrounds of the elementary school, there are definite divisions between what girls do in grade one and what boys do. The girls are skipping outside at recess time.

> "That's a rhyme," someone says, "here's another one -- Cats, dogs, fish, bird...Cats get the measles, dogs get the flu, chickens get the chicken pox and so do you." There are

> more rhymes as they skip. Meanwhile I can see the boys racing around and through the area but they don't stop to skip. The conversation revolves around the fact that this is good exercise, fun for girls and boys can do it too. One girl said, "Boys don't like it but girls do it mostly."(May 21, 1996)

Clearly, they have picked out gender divisions. They recognize that there is a difference in being able to do something and wanting to do it, on the basis of gender. They are "certainly cognizant of the sex role behaviour that is appropriate in the culture" (King, Chipman & Cruz-Janzen, 1994, p.13). Gender divisions are surely part of the social knowledge children are internalizing as they learn about relationships from each other.

However, when problems occur, the teacher's input is sought as they come back to class. They internalize what is right and what is wrong. Behaviour at play is still subject to a moral code. In the following example, the children and teacher are discussing the problem of playing in the mud during the noon hour.

> The discussion turns to the "mud incident " that happened at noon. "What can we do instead?" asks the teacher and there are suggestions from the children for how the problem could be solved. One says, "But we didn't have any kicking mud" indicating that the play in the mud is better than what might have been. (May 7, 1996)

Part of being in a relationship with others is respecting the moral codes and understanding the necessity for a standard. Researchers have labeled the stages for

children of this age as either moral realism (Piaget, 1965 as cited in Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998) or preconventional (Kohlberg, 1981 as cited in Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998). Children look at consequences and obey in order to avoid punishment. These views have been tempered by recent researchers (Baumrind, 1978; Campbell & Christopher, 1996; Gilligan, 1982 as cited by Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998) as they look at how culture affects the development of moral standards in groups. Regardless of the stance or the label, moral codes are an integrated part of any school curricular endeavours. In an institutional setting like school, this is seen as a major socialization goal. Being in a group means learning to adhere to group standards. Grade two experiences reinforce this as they remind each other of transgressions.

> They're working on THINKPADS -- a writing time. There is still noise and Deana says, "You guys are wasting her time, she'll [the teacher] waste ours." Someone else says, "It won't be very pleasant." (May 15, 1996)

In this movement towards group process, it is possible to speculate that one step along the way is recognizing the possibilities of group behaviour and the consequent reactions to transgressions and co-operation. Is this a curriculum of moral codes, of understanding how society works? It seems to me that it is certainly the foundation and it is most certainly a by-product of institutional life, no matter where or when. Developmentally, children must build in layers an understanding which deepens with the passing of time and future relationships. Toddlers begin it when they learn to recognize routines, preschoolers build upon this and begin the process of developing friends. In turn the kindergarten child solidifies this learning. The grade one child recognizes that there are

standards and the grade two child recognizes the importance of compliance to standards, to the benefit of the whole group. Surely this is a seam of learning that may be expected but not prescribed as the major goal of education and care. Yet it is a persistent and sure outcome in most schooling experiences, at least in the early childhood years.

Discoveries

Because there is no program of studies in the day care centre, the children and staff are not bound to an external set of goals and objectives; thus, children remain free to pursue a curriculum of learning about routines and relationships through their play episodes. At the same time, toddlers and preschoolers are learning about the physical world -- the properties of sand, water, blocks and so much more. Their play focuses on these materials and others as they satisfy curiosities:

- How high can I build a block tower?
- How much sand can I put in the wagon and still manage to move it?
- How fast can I pedal this trike?
- What will happen if I tie this rope around the adult?
- How much sand will go into this container?
- Will I be able to get to the other side of the monkey bars?
- Where does the water go when I pour it in the sand?
- What happens to the table if I pour water on it?

There are so many other interesting questions that are inherent in children's play. The questions are not verbalized but are part of the experimentation and exploration represented through play. Unspoken questions are evident in many forms of play, at many different ages. Some questions are spoken aloud and are clear indicators of thinking

processes. But more often adults must look to representation to gain a sense of the process of curriculum. Often representation can be seen in writing samples, artwork, math products, tests, and so on. However, it should be evident as well in play episodes, for the narratives of play are also a form of representation. This kind of representation can be observed physical activity and the play with words of older children. The following sections contain several examples of how children represent their discoveries and their sense of being active agents in the classroom curriculum.

Grade two children use code words in their discourse. I have previously discussed this from a play perspective and now wish to consider this phenomenon as it relates to curriculum. During my time in their grade two classroom, I heard many puzzling phrases which I assume come from the sparks of media interactions such as "carnage in the skies" and "unidentified flying banana"'. What sparks this code? How does it get used in play? There is obviously a meaningful relationship between their play and the words, otherwise they would not use this code. I sense that these are words that they are trying to decode for themselves, a deconstruction process. On the day I heard "unidentified flying banana" (which I have since learned comes from a television program) one child had a banana for snack. The word play that ensued was a transitional activity during snack time after recess. While not a structured learning activity, there is an important connection here. The banana from home connected to the memory of the television program which was then expressed as part of play. This code comes from the lived experiences of the children outside the classroom and is transferred across the schoolroom door to connect both worlds. It is also connected to a sense of control -- they know what it means but the adult might not.

Children found ways to develop their own curriculum through play in the niches of classroom life. This word play also occurs during more structured lessons as well. A brainstorming activity seemed to be a regular routine. This has already been detailed in the previous discussion about play so will not be repeated here except to say that it connects curriculum and play. This play with words allows children to explore the concept "as tall as" and represent their knowledge in a playful manner; responses were quick, and illuminated the active engagement of most of the students in the class. The word play demonstrates for me an engagement between teacher and students as co-creators of curriculum. The concept is played with to stimulate thinking about an idea. The teacher respects contributions and accepts children's input into the process. It is another representation of their discoveries. Other children in the study represented the connections they were making. One does not need to be in an elementary school setting to find a way of displaying what is learned.

Toddlers explore materials, often in functional play. They manipulate and repeat actions to learn more about how something works. Sally's play with sand is a typical incident and one that is repeated in many media. Sometimes it is combined in play with other players and materials. Annie's connections are displayed in her play as she begins to straddle the line between functional and symbolic play.

> Annie and a friend are in the plastic car. She gets in and drives, stopping to look at me. "Where are you going?" I ask. "To McDonald's" she replies and drives away only to stop a few feet further on. A friend dumps sand over the car and in it and then empties more on the outside of the car.

> Annie gets out of the car, goes to the sand, scoops more into the bucket and places it carefully on the back of the car and continues on. (August 15, 1996)

It is the functional pouring of the sand that intrigues the player but Annie feels the need to keep the bucket full even if she's not going to pour it. This representation shows the steps in moving from functional to symbolic play. Cognitively, children layer another stage of play on top of the stage of play with which they are already familiar. For Annie, the next step is symbolic play. She is moving up a stair case, keeping one foot on the step below but tentatively putting the forward foot on the next tread. The bucket, full of sand, has some meaning for her and it is important that it occupy the place in the car. She's moving beyond the dump and pour to the bucket as a symbol for something else. The kindergarten group also represent their discoveries in fascinating ways.

Kindergarten children explore concepts in play as a contribution to the classroom curriculum. Block building demonstrates this quite clearly.

> John says, " See my motorcycle. It's allowed two persons. Motorcycles run on oil." Pat says, "Just gas!" John says, "No oil too, you know." The boys have built their motorcycles in front of the house door. "Seatbelts!" but John says, "This one doesn't. Most motorcycles don't." (May 11, 1992)

The boys are carefully constructing a schema about how machines work. It would seem they are recreating what they have seen elsewhere in order to deepen their understanding and solidify the structure in their minds. Quite apart from that, their use of blocks is

providing them with a foundation for later learning in physics as they explore balance, pivot points and levers. They also explore math concepts as they use units, stacking like and unlike together and creating patterns.

I was fascinated by the exploration of curriculum in the grade one class. It was apparent that students felt valued as contributors to curriculum since they did not hesitate to put forth their ideas and their agenda for exploration. This was most evident in the week long adventure with the tulips. It began when Colin brought a tulip to school one afternoon and continued through the week as they designed experiments to follow up on their questions about the structure and properties of the tulip. The tulip led to a series of teachable moments, sometimes over-riding the teacher's agenda for learning.

> After recess, they look at what Colin brought for the classroom -- tulips! "At night they close" someone says. Another says they come back every year and they have leaves. The teacher uses questions to draw out their knowledge. They discuss the shutting of the leaves. The teacher starts with a question like, "Who thinks..." and there are many responses. The class decides that they will put the tulip in a locker until 3:00 p.m. and then check to see if the petals have closed up. (May 21, 1996)

Later, they explored many different aspects of tulips as has been previously discussed. There were many times when the teacher sacrificed a planned lesson to accommodate the curriculum the children were building. For example, the class drew before and after pictures of the tulip instead of the scheduled math lesson. Another time, sudden changes

in the weather sparked a new curriculum.

> Suddenly, a loud boom sounds and the children react to thunder and lightning with great excitement. In an attempt to reassure and calm them, the teacher talks about the fact that sometimes things happen. "Fire," says one. The teacher says, "No, but the power might go out, the lights go out, so let's make a plan." And so children and teacher create a plan. "Don't get worried or scream," says Jane. "Put pencils down and stop working'" says Bill. "Sing!" says another child and Jim suggests, "Rain, rain go away." "It's just that it's dark," says someone and Don says "Thunder, thunder go away." All of their ideas are written onto the board at the front of the room and now they have a plan. "Fire drill," they say and they recall the plan for a fire drill. In an aside to me, the teacher says, "Boy! If that isn't divergent! We were going to make windsocks later." (May 27, 1996)

Together, students and teacher found a way to represent their learning -- the children through their discussions and wondering out loud of possibilities and the teacher through a concrete way of recording their interests.

Preschoolers also represent their thoughts, their curriculum. Just as in kindergarten play, this often takes the form of socio-dramatic play and the examples of building and exploring are similar. But they have other ways of representing their

interests. They have recently begun using the computer and creating projects with art materials. Their interests are varied and they move from activity to activity freely.

> Kelsea and Karin are playing near the slide/climber. "Let's play this is the circles," says one and the other replies, "Okay". Down the slide they go, several times, bumping heads. "I didn't bump my head," says one, "that was very fast!" "How fast?" asks the other. "20 million" is the answer. Kelsea asks for help on the monkey bars. Soon the girls leave the monkey bars and are next seen over near the door to the classroom. They have paper and markers and are concentrating on drawing pictures. Karin gets up to stand by the door but Kelsea continues drawing. In a short while the girls wander over to the wooden car, arm in arm and Kelsea becomes the driver. She says, "It is a fast bumpy ride." (August 14, 1996)

Primarily, these girls represent their curriculum through verbal interactions. They comment frequently on the play and what they are doing as well as recreating through drawing. Theirs is a very physical understanding as they manoeuver the monkey bars, drive the car, and draw pictures.

Tim is moving between the toddler and preschool groups. His solitary play stretched to include me. His understanding of one of life's routines, filling the car with gas, is being extended in his play as he recreates and practices what should happen as the car is being filled with gas.

> Tim came to show me how clean the car was. He rubbed the top and one of the caregivers told me how hard he had worked to clean it. Now it is time to fill the car with gas and he takes the car to the plastic gas pumps set up near the edge of the sand area. He tells me to save the car and he goes to get the pumps and bring them closer. He pumps the gas, turning it around and filling it up again. He repeats this action until we go through," Premium, unleaded and regular " as it would appear on the pumps in a real gas station. "Save the car," he says and he goes to get the bike and another car. By now there are three vehicles lined up like a train and he gases them up and attaches them together with a skipping rope. (August 21,1996)

This play was very methodical and organized and Tim's action seemed an exact representation of real world experience. For example, pumping the gas appeared to take the amount of time it would for a real car in a real gas station. Can I infer that he is aware of time? Perhaps not, but I might instead suggest that he has gained a sense of ownership over this part of life's routines by replaying it. His curriculum is to make sense of the events in his life.

Representation is the indicator for us as adults that children are engaging in a curriculum process which makes their thinking somewhat transparent for us.

<u>The co-creator experience</u>

Both teacher and child are engaged in a mutual process of creating classroom

curriculum. Much of this is hidden in the seams, visible only in the dance of words and movement of classroom interactions. Through the examples previously cited, it is evident that children do modify curriculum and recreate it in their own forms. But this can only occur if a teacher values and respects their interests. The grade one teacher talks about this co-creation during an interview.

> They could bring this one little thing in tomorrow and that could send us off in another [direction]. So I think that's their way of changing the curriculum. As a teacher you got to be quick on the draw and be able to get the jump on those kinds of things. That's a wonderful process that happens in an elementary school -- if you're not rigid.

There is no doubt in my mind that what she described happened in all of the early childhood programs I observed. The teacher must respect contributions from children for this to occur and, in some cases, must deliberately structure the environment so that it will occur. The teachers that I observed seemed to use questions to set up this scenario. Perhaps they used questions merely to involve children in thinking, but I propose that every time we invite children to participate in looking for answers in a real and genuine manner, we are inviting them into a curriculum generating process. If teachers use questions which have specific answers implied and are less open ended, this might not be the case. But the speculative kinds of questions that I saw in all of the settings were usually meant to prod children into searching for their own understanding of concepts and ideas.

In grade two, the teacher uses questions to clarify, extend and promote problem

solving. In turn, children use questions to clarify their understanding, make connections, extend their curiosity or control the agenda. These questions are part of the web of classroom life. As the questions are examined, the dyadic teaching/learning relationship is also exposed. In this relationship it is possible to see the development of classroom curriculum as one in which the partners take on co-creator roles as they shape the learning through their active engagement.

For example, during a brainstorming session on another topic, a child in grade two asked a question specifically about the contraction for "I will". The teacher stopped the plan she had developed and dealt with this teachable moment (May 8, 1996). Questions like this, and teacher response to these moments, are not unique to this setting. On other occasions, it is the questions that grade two children ask each other that create new curriculum or bring shared understanding to light, as in this example.

> Perry reads a written report about potbellied pigs and has a poster with a painted backdrop. There is some interruption and restlessness, but they have been sitting for some time. Questions from his audience include: "Do they get any bigger?" "Are they the size of a real pig?" " Was that hard to make?" "What colour can they be?" "Do you have any?" "How slow or how fast can pigs go?" "How much different foods can they eat?" " Can you make the noise?" Perry answers these questions sometimes on his own and sometimes with prompting from the teacher. (May 28, 1996)

The content of the thoughtful questions these children asked of Perry display a real interest in the subject matter and extend the concepts he was presenting. Apart from the content, what is especially interesting is the role the children take on. They are taking on a responsibility for their own learning. The collaborative nature of their exploration of the topic intrigues me and reminds me of the possibilities inherent in a constructivist approach where adults "help children discover answers and, more importantly still, to help them ask themselves good questions" (Rinaldi, 1993, p.104). This is emergent curriculum (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). However, children are not always ready to pose their own questions without more specific adult help.

In other settings, particularly in day care, questions are used by the adults to encourage children to make connections.

> "Is it raining?" asks the caregiver as two children peer through the door to the outside. They agree it is and the caregiver sings, "Rain rain go away" and asks "Was it raining lots at home over the weekend?" "It was at my house," says one child, "water stays there." (August 6, 1996)

The adult is encouraging children to connect this rain experience to previous experience. She provides the content of the questions so that they can connect their memories to the present. Very young children display magical thought "water stays there" and have difficulty with time concepts. In posing her questions, the adult is setting up a zone of proximal development, a "dynamic zone of sensitivity in which learning and cognitive development occur" (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p.26).

In kindergarten, children used questions to ask one another for more information or the teacher asked questions to focus or extend play so they could work through a particular concept or idea. In this example, the teacher takes a secondary role, but still supports and stretches the learning.

> The children and the teacher dramatize *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Children are picked for the parts and finally everyone is ready. Miss Fisher says, "Are we ready storytellers? What do we need to start with? Where do they want to go? Who goes first? Let's see what happens." (March 20, 1992)

In these examples children ask questions to get at content and also to understand the underlying process of the experience. Teachers use questions in much the same manner. In grade one, questions were used for the same purpose. To include them here would simply be repetitive. There were many examples of the important use of questions to further children's understanding and connections to learning. Questions are not always connected securely to prevalent curriculum -- sometimes they take the adult or teacher and students off on a wonderful journey towards new learning.

<u>Mismatched agendas</u>

In some cases, teacher and children have opposing agendas or views of what classroom life is like. As the decision making power regarding what they are learning moves further away from children, it is possible that there will emerge separate agendas for learning. Schooling and learning should not be confused. They are not always the same thing, nor is learning the sole activity in the classroom, nor does learning only occur

in classrooms. Some of the examples given in this discussion have occurred on the playground. Nevertheless, if curriculum can be defined simply as a plan for learning, then the location does not really need to become specific. When are opposing views evident? Generally, throughout my observations, I would summarize by saying that agendas differ when power enters the question and when adults are able to see implications or consequences which may become harmful for children.

In the day care setting, children were sometimes not able to follow their own plan for learning if there was an indication of harm for self or others. A concern for safety lead adults to impose their plan over that of children's. For example, during outdoor play, children may not throw sand or race around the sidewalk area with riding toys. Helmets must be worn.

> Harriet and Annie are over by TUGGY (a large plastic boat structure) -- outside in the play yard. A caregiver comes over and places a hat on Annie's head and says that Harriet needs one too. Annie is sitting in a wagon and waiting and the caregiver says, "Annie, you need to wear a helmet if you go on this" and helps Annie put one on over her hat. (August 14, 1996)

The adult sense of responsibility for safety takes precedence over the child's agenda. As well children must be supervised directly on the play yard and often an adult will take a participant role, which may change the shape of the play as originally constructed by the children or may extend it. An example of this is Donna's play with Harriet and others as the police traffic officer, described in Chapter Five. Donna stops the children for

speeding and gives out tickets. Her role in the play stretches the play from a functional kind of play, riding wheeled toys, to a socio-dramatic play as she provides the narrative. Her participation is the scaffold which allows children to extend their play and link what they see in the real world to what they can play. Her presence in the play also illuminates her sense of responsibility since she now regulates their speed on the wheeled toys.

In the kindergarten room, similar constraints are imposed for the safety of other players. But, another kind of agenda surfaces which is either not expected by the adult or not recognized as a valid experience. Children create their own props to extend play themselves. To do this, they must carry out a plan and seek out materials not provided by the teacher as in this example.

> The firemen are wandering. "We're 911! We're 911!" They are checking out the house and other areas of the classroom. "Got to check if the door is hot." Meanwhile Donnie has made another prop. This time it is a gas mask, made from a berry basket, a piece of cardboard tubing and a plastic coil rope. The materials are located in the art centre on a recycling shelf and the boys help themselves. Not only does Donnie spark interest in the play through this, but the activity spreads and soon there are several gas masks being made. They are able to use these props in their play quite accurately as they continue their fire fighting throughout the room. (April 29, 1992)

Children create props for play and in doing so strengthen the curriculum of their narrative

play. The ability to make decisions like this indicates that the children have ownership of this curriculum. They are able to extend the play themselves because they control it.

Teacher's expectations of what the shared agenda will contain may also supersede those of the children's. Group times are prime examples of this phenomenon. Teachers expect children's co-operation and insist on a fairly rigorous attention to the group activity although individual independence during a self-selected activity may be another distinct expectation. Group co-operation and compliance is certainly not an unknown expectation of most teachers. It is only when you examine this practice at a deeper level that a realization of the ability of young children to cope fairly well with such a mixed signal emerges and wins respect. How is it that they switch easily to meet such different expectations in different situations within the same context of the classroom? It is indicative of their resiliency that they can adapt their responses to the contextual differences of each setting in which they are participants. Perhaps it is the flexibility of their cognitive structures that enables this adaptability.

During the elementary school years, the opportunities for more individual control of the learning agenda diminish with the ever-increasing demands of a specified program of studies. When teachers must cover mandated curricula goals and objectives, it becomes more apparent that the children's agenda sinks to a deeper level. It is not as easily observable except in crisis situations. I am convinced, however, that it remains firmly fixtured in the landscape of the schooling process. In grade one and in grade two, the teachers sometimes shared power with the students. The tulip experience is a clear example of such sharing. However, this sharing of power is not always the case. The questions children ask are sometimes an indication that they are working on a different

agenda; for example, the questions that we as adults might see as stalling techniques or attention seeking devices. Sometimes the questions are not even needed. It is in the behaviour itself that we see that the agendas don't match.

> The class is working with the teacher using small individual clocks. They are learning to tell time and she asks them to show her 3:00, 3:10, 2:50, 4:30 and so on. Meanwhile over near the garbage can beside the teacher's desk, two girls are pulling Kleenex after Kleenex out of the box, wiping their noses once and depositing them in the garbage can. (May 21,1996)

Whether the agenda of the two girls was that they had a cold or that they were wasting time doesn't matter. What is evident is that they were not engaged on the same agenda as the teacher and the rest of the class. This behaviour might be seen as negative, but there is a positive spin in seeing this as a signal that there is an underlying problem. Perhaps these girls are looking for some control in this situation.

The issues of curriculum are not easily resolved. Nor can the question what is curriculum be easily answered, except in understanding the daily lives of the classroom constituents. It is not possible in some of our school settings to view children always fulfilling their own agenda with regard to developing a personal curriculum. It is the very nature of our adult-child relationship that prescribes the kind of curriculum experiences we think are important so that children can be prepared for adult life. Too often, however, we as teachers, do not control the agenda enough to ensure that the curriculum we share in the classroom is relevant and appropriate to the children's needs and our own as

partners with them in learning. Curriculum is mandated at a distance and becomes politicized. The dichotomy of near versus far decision making provides a conflict for teachers and ultimately children. As a result, teachers feel disempowered in the classroom, frustrated and pressured to cover as much of the program of studies as possible to meet the restrictions of a test that is not contextually relevant to children's learning needs. How much do children lose if a teacher feels pressured to deliver the curriculum and can't take time to talk about tulips? This is the real gold in the seams. The result of ignoring the gold is a constant gaze on the future. Consequently, we miss the possibilities of the present with the result that the "potential of children is stunted " (Rinaldi, 1993,p.104). There is no room left for learning that is truly intrinsically motivated.

And so, we overlook the gold in the seams that is children's learning. They expose the learning for us as they mediate a mandated program of studies with the veins and seams that reflect the glints of gold that are buried in the curriculum of a daily rhythm of classroom life. As teachers, we must be vigilant for children's interests. As learners, they, and we, have a stake in the lived experience that is curriculum in our day to day lives.

Chapter Eight
Taking the Gold to the Smelter: Adult-Child Relationships

I start from a position that a schooling experience is built upon a relationship in learning.

> Even as children learn more and more to manage for themselves as they get older, they cannot really dispense with adult presence. We need to remind ourselves of the steps a child takes toward independence and toward establishing his own code of behaviour.... There remain times throughout most of childhood when the adult's presence stabilizes children, even if there is no actual adult intervention. This, too, is part of relationships. (Beck, 1973, pp.122 -123)

Maintaining an appropriate relationship with children which supports their drive for independent learning means understanding that presence is part of the physical and emotional domains.

All of the teachers in this study, and likely in most schools, demonstrate that they care deeply about students. What differentiates their approach to teaching seems to be an understanding of their position in relation to the children in the classroom. In our society, adults often stand in a relationship of power to the children with whom they interact. The discrepancy in our physical size and the nature of intellectual development indeed reinforces a sense of vertical relationship with children. We assume responsibility for children as younger members of society and as immature learners. Perhaps this

sometimes gets in the way of a real and urgent understanding of children as capable learners and decision-makers in the curricular process. In a discussion of this nature, it seems that it is almost impossible not to focus on the adult aspect of the relationship. Our understanding of the nature of the adult views of childhood is based on the evidence appearing in the adult-child relationship. Indeed, the premise of adult views of childhood sets up the discussion. There is a real danger of not being able to see beyond our own role as adults to the role children play in the relationship. My concern in this aspect of the study centers on trying to see beyond this barrier. Alas, I feel I may not have been very successful in doing so since my viewing lens has been coloured by my original conceptual framework focusing on adult views. There are flashes, in some of the discussions I had with children, that have given me a glimpse into the seam that houses the child's view of the adult and the child's sense of the relationship. However, this may need to be the focus of another study in the future.

My own growing awareness of children as capable creators has certainly influenced how I have viewed these classroom relationships. It began as I watched the kindergarten children accepting and adapting to teaching styles that differed according to the context within the environment. These children were resilient, not in the sense of having to cope with major trauma or stress and survival as studied by Werner (cited in Craig, Kermis & Digdon, 1998) but in managing the requirements of everyday life. I was struck by the ability of these children to modify their behaviour according to the teacher's expectations which seemed to differ sharply from self-selected activity to group times. As I stated in my master's study:

> The contrast is sharp and must surely provide children with

> mixed messages, but they give no hint of experiencing confusion. Occasionally, during play, they are conscious of the noise level, or that cleanup is an important part of the play, but there is no evidence that this is inhibiting play. As the differing expectations of the sections of kindergarten experience are considered, it is not possible to reconcile the fit. They are like two puzzle pieces from different puzzles put in the same spot. Inconsistencies in the role of the adult with regard to power must at some point result in cognitive friction and impede growth. But I could see no visible sign. (Brown, 1993, p. 96)

What was the relationship here between this adult and the children? As I continued to observe these children and their teacher I began to see how close they had become, how cohesive a group they were and how they seemed to care about each other. It didn't seem to matter that they had to adjust to a different style during circle. This example started me down the path to examining my own classroom practice and I realized that I too had expected different behaviours of children in circle than I encouraged in centre time -- a phenomenon common to just about every kindergarten room I had ever experienced. So what was happening here? Why did this teacher and countless others change expectations? These questions were, in a sense, an epiphany for me and a prod for examining my own practice. The answer was that the teacher had a sense of what was coming next for children in the schooling experience and was trying to prepare them for a change in experiences. The question somehow didn't arise of preparing the next teacher

for these children (something we have rarely, if ever, done!) but rather of preparing the children for the teacher. The children had to change but the teacher did not. As I became enmeshed in this concept I found myself debating the whole premise of equal relationships and the compromises that must occur for a relationship to be sustained. It seemed to me that children were asked always to compromise and adults were not. I began to question and read about our conduct as adults in this relationship with children and to be concerned about the ethics of caring. I began also to think about adult motivation with regard to children in relationships and this led me to speculate about the child as "other" (Levinas, 1985) in our society. Do we, as adults, understand that children are "others" in our society? Do we know that we separate them from the community in well-intentioned ways as we try to protect them? Even as we protect, we control. Can we try to transcend our "selves" so that we accept, as Levinas says, that the "other" fulfills us?

I would like to be able to pull out seams of commonalities in the relationships I observed in the research sites, but I find it a daunting and impossible task to list the attributes without the richness of the context. Instead I find myself compelled to provide a glimpse of each relationship, to discuss each one separately. I recognize that I must try not to make evaluations or judgments, since I cannot possibly see inside all of these participants' motives. To do so seems critical, but I am not sure I can keep such a resolution since my biases will certainly colour my comments. To describe will be to provide a window onto the relationship. But I must also admit that you will be peeking through the curtains I have hung.

Daycare

Teachers in daycare spend a long day with the children in their care. There is a misconception that all they are providing is care and not education. This myth obscures and negates the tremendous amount of learning that occurs within a child's life. Perhaps the distinction that needs to be made is not between education and care but rather between education and schooling. In our quest for lifelong education, it is time to recognize that school is not the only site for learning. For some children, it may not be a site for learning at all.

Teachers in daycare seem to place a heavy emphasis on caring in their approach to children. They assume the responsible position in the relationship. They provide the necessities of a safe and warm, nurturing environment so that children feel secure and valued. They recognize children's important milestones by posting messages recognizing birthdays and celebrating important events in the child's life. One such example is the concept of Happy Leaving. When a child leaves to go to another room in the centre or leaves the centre entirely, a Happy Leaving party is planned. In this way children feel valued and an appropriate closure assists the child in bridging a transition. Such a party was planned for Harriet and Hal as they left the toddler room and moved to the preschool room. Visits between the two rooms and the staff's joint planning ensured a smooth transition for the children. Thus, transitions -- going outside to play, going to meals and going to a new room within the centre or away from it -- are planned for and recognized as valid events in a child's life which demonstrates the adult's interpretation of the child as a serious member of society. Staff in the preschool room planned for the arrival of these two children and spent extra time observing them when they arrived and in

intervening in situations likely to cause stress. I sensed the caring in the watchful eyes of the adults who seemed attuned to the needs and had planned which of them would take responsibility for the transition period. Similarly, when children arrive new to the centre, parents are strongly encouraged to tour the centre completely, spend as much time as they can playing in the centre with their children over the course of days, not just hours or minutes. What follows is an example of this transition process. The child and parent seemed so much a part of the room already that I didn't realize immediately that she was a parent.

> There is another adult watching today in addition to the staff. She sits with a child on her knee watching the children play with the milk carton blocks -- perhaps a parent observing for the morning? Outside I learn that the child is new today and the parent is spending some time helping the child to feel comfortable. (August 2, 1996)

These examples demonstrate that adults in this situation are prepared to look at the environment from the children's point of view. It seems that staff consider how children might be feeling in these transitions and try to understand how children's feelings impact their actions in the centre. Do adults plan for the effects of transitions adequately in group situations for children? Perhaps not. The limitations of any group or institutional setting make this difficult. While individualized attention is an important goal, the requirements of managing groups often means putting the group's needs ahead of the individual's needs. As staff reassure children during transition experiences, they are also sending a message that they validate the feelings of anxiety and stress that might

occur. A recognition of the security needs of these young children is found in the adults' internalization of the principles of developmentally appropriate practice.

> Children need time to talk about their feelings and sensitive adults to listen and help them prepare for the exciting and positive changes that are a natural part of growing up. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.122)

This represents a compromise on the part of the adults to ensure that the relationship strengthens and deepens.

A commitment to the children is demonstrated in the caregivers' playful daily interactions. Play is chosen by children and entered into with adults in a participation or facilitation role. The adult's role implies a recognition that, although children are in a position of care in a perhaps unequal arrangement, there is room for negotiation and children do have some control over their own daily rhythms. The following example indicates Alice's control and the caregiver's sense of valuing this process.

> Alice is sitting in a plastic car on the perimeter sidewalk of the play yard. She appears to be watching the play of others and the work of the caregiver, who has gone to get a broom. The caregiver begins to sweep the sidewalk. Alice says "No". The caregiver says, "No? No sweep?" The caregiver stops and waits. Soon Alice beeps the horn on her car, turns it and pedals away. The caregiver returns to her sweeping. (August 15, 1996)

No opportunity is wasted as can be seen in this episode. The caregiver uses an

appropriate speech pattern to encourage a longer phrase in return from the child. Even though the child does not respond at this time, the example has still been provided. In addition, the caregiver has listened to the child's objections and waits for further developments. This denotes respect for the child's concern, even if the adult is unsure of what the concern is, an example of emotional presence.

Bollnow (1964/88) tells us we cannot escape our responsibility for children, but we can provide for their growing independence. Toddlers are very much in the stage of discovering their independence (Erikson, 1963) and this seems to be valued in the playroom. Adults provide the children with choices and help them through conflicts. Some of these examples of choice and conflict have been previously described from a play or curriculum perspective but do illuminate the adult-child relationship as well. Adults do not give children the answer to a conflict, rather they help them problem solve to reach a compromise which is acceptable to both parties.

As well, children are provided with a secure and safe routine. Earlier, I have discussed the importance of learning about life's routines as the curriculum of the toddler. When we examine the adult role here, it is possible to see that understanding what children need to learn is a responsibility adults take seriously. It is part of the ethical approach to sustaining the relationship to know when and how much to provide without swamping the other in the relationship. Each person in a relationship deserves a role in this process. If, as adults, we take too much responsibility for children, we risk usurping their roles and unbalancing our own. Our sense of being responsible and accountable for children, particularly in school settings, may mean that we deny choice in the interest of what is perceived as "right" for children.

Elkind (1987) cautions us that we are pressuring children and denying them their childhood. Despite our good intentions, we may not always know when we are going beyond the limits of our responsibilities for children. Part of the adult role in a relationship is knowing when to make the choice for children and knowing when to step back and let them make their own choices.

> It's snack time and children are coming to the table in the toddler room. One child chooses a chair at the table, sits in it for a few seconds, then gets up. He moves the chair out of the way. It is a red one but there must be something he doesn't like about it. He selects another chair from another spot, also a red one and moves it into his spot. An adult nearby moves his first red chair into the vacant spot and helps him adjust his new red chair to his comfort. (August 21, 1996)

I believe that choice is a strong component of the dynamic relationship in which children and adults learn together. Choice and decision making implies that there is some control and, consequently, validation of the intrinsic motivation that prompts learning. There were many examples beyond choosing play props; for example, children could decide not to eat snack or to play quietly on their beds instead of sleeping. But having a choice is not always possible. Sometimes adults must step in as we seek to ensure safety. In the following example, the child could not choose because of safety issues; however, his feelings were validated.

> Two boys are playing in the block area. They stop to watch

> a conflict that has arisen between two other boys. A situation has arisen and Lana, the caregiver, tries to effect a compromise and help them problem solve. One child begins to kick and scream and Lana removes him to the hallway where she holds him firmly as he continues to cry and soothingly rubs his back. (August 9, 1996)

There are times when children can be in control of the activity which implies a more passive role for adults as in this example.

> Jack is tying Lana up and has been for a few minutes. During this time she has been sitting in the chair and chatting with him about what he is doing. She keeps reminding him that she has to go the toddler room soon. (She is floating staff, moving from room to room as required.) The tying up process continues as he loops the rope around her leg and through the chair. "I wouldn't mind, " she says "if I didn't have to go." "You'll never get away from here," says Jack and the chair follows Lana as she moves away from him. Another caregiver has returned and Lana extricates herself finally because she must go to the other room. (August 8, 1996)

Jack was in control of the activity until Lana's duties meant that she had to resume a more active role and leave the play setting. Initiative must be respected and valued if children are to grow into a relationship with those around them.

> When children can call on their inner resources and find validation for their own ideas, they perceive themselves as capable, effective, and powerful. They consequently become more independent and self-reliant. (Reynolds, 1996, p. 6)

When adults can move in this direction, the relationship changes and moves from one based on power to one based on viewing children as learners and capable. This moves beyond seeing children as "other". It emphasizes the co in the co-creation of curriculum. This is partnership in learning.

Grade two

Most teachers worry about their students. In this classroom, both the teacher and the students struggled against an impending deadline. The children in this class had experienced a number of substitute teachers during the year. This particular teacher came to them in April and had been with them only a month when I began observing. As a consequence, I felt they had barely begun to know each other and the school term was rapidly advancing. Because of the children's prior experiences, this teacher felt that they needed to "catch up" on a great deal of curriculum so that they could be ready for the following year of school. She worried that they would not be ready and that their behaviour in class, understandable though it might be, would interfere with learning. She said,

> So they were all of a sudden given a teacher who came in and said [to the children] "Listen this is not the way it's going to work." And I guess my expectations were the

> biggest thing. All of a sudden they learned that it has to be done neatly, their printing, you just couldn't read it. They got it done as quickly as they could so they could move onto something else where I tried to emphasize that it's not so much the quantity you get done but it's the quality.... Listening was a major accomplishment in the first three weeks....I guess I'm feeling the crunch now too.

Her concern was genuine and she had tried many ways to bring them together in their learning. In an interview, some of the children also expressed concern for her as the teacher. They stated that they were aware that sometimes the class did not co-operate as they should. Finally, the teacher instituted a reward system on the advice of other teachers in the school. Children had input into the types of rewards that could be attained and she purchased several items. Each child had a square with thirty spaces on his or her desk. As she caught them being "good" she stamped a square. When all thirty were filled up, they chose a prize. She reflected on this practice in the following excerpt.

> I notice they went home in a different mood and so did I. I could stand at the door and say goodbye with a smile on my face and actually mean it.

This concern included preparing children for the future, not only in the prescribed program of studies but also in the hidden curriculum of respecting authority and classroom conventions deemed appropriate to facilitate learning. The role of the school in socializing children to an adult world of expected behaviour seems an important goal of this classroom, based on a perception of prior classroom confusion.

The relationship here seemed to revolve on authority, based on power. The teacher often required silence, sitting still, paying attention, and completing assigned tasks. This type of power can be classified as a "power on" situation in which the teacher's purpose addressed. It flows from the notion of the teacher who is "in charge" (Reynolds & Jones, 1997, p.102). There are other possibilities -- "power for" and "power with" reflect a facilitative and a participatory role for the teacher; however, the "power on" position is a common expectation in many elementary classrooms. In this grade two classroom, it seemed quite pronounced. I suspect that this was largely due to time issues and the constraint this teacher felt with a prescribed curriculum. As well, a young teacher, in her first classroom assignment, coming into the end of a year and faced with a group who had experienced such confusion in a teaching/learning relationship, must of course adapt her teaching style to what she feels will be most effective and not necessarily what she truly believes should happen. She indicated this when she talked about how curriculum arises in the classroom and her concern that she couldn't always follow their interests because " I feel the pressure of having to get certain things done."

It is evident that she values the children and that she worries about them as learners, but she has not yet found an effective way of communicating in the relationship. There hasn't been time to establish a reciprocal mode of communication in which she allows them room to make some of the decisions. On the other hand, some of the responsibility lies with the children as they respond to yet another teacher who may or may not be there tomorrow. They must learn to trust but, based on their experiences, their confusion prohibits them from fully engaging in the relationship; hence, their testing of her and their continual pushing of the limits. It may seem that, whatever response she

makes, someone in the class may be unhappy.

> Children may fault teachers for acts of omission and commission: for not interceding on behalf of children, for making (avoidable) mistakes, for embarrassing and humiliating children, and for being unfair. What some children deem a failing may not be so judged by other children or by adults; what are labeled "failings" may indeed be viewed as "strengths" by others, including those to whom they are attributed. (Waksler, 1996, p.155)

Although there is not an effective group dynamic in place, on an individual basis, this teacher and the children seemed to share moments that were real and demonstrated their caring for each other. This is evident in the pride she feels in them as they presented their projects to an audience of parents and siblings and she is able to see that "yes we got somewhere." This caring is echoed in the interviews I held with some of the children in the class as they expressed concern that they weren't always as good as they should be in class for the teacher.

I suspect that experience is the mitigating factor here -- the children's previous experience throughout the school year and the teacher's previous experience which was just at a beginning point. Lilian Katz (1985) discusses the stages that teachers encounter in their professional journeys. Her premise is that the first years of teaching are filled with anxiety and difficulty -- survival -- which give way to the consolidation, renewal and maturity possible in later years. Had this teacher experienced a greater variety of students previously, she may have developed more classroom management strategies or

perhaps less concern about a required curriculum that exerted such pressure on her and the children. Often in group situations there seemed to be two distinct factions, a "her" and a "them" scenario, that disappeared as she interacted on an individual and personal basis with the children in the classroom. The over-riding impression I have of this relationship is that it is one sided -- the teacher seems to be taking most of the responsibility and the onus for establishing the sense of consistency that will form a base for trust in the classroom. When the classroom environment is less than conducive to appropriate learning, I suspect she is blaming herself. This was evident in the interview selection that follows.

> I guess because I would think they know what we need to get done in that period of time. I wish I could do more....I really found myself getting down. I started blaming myself. What am I doing wrong?

Above all, she demonstrated that even though her method or her orientation to the relationship is based on power and authority, she has a deeply rooted ethic of caring about the children in her classroom and feels herself to be responsible for all of their experiences. She wants them to feel successful, she wants them to have positive learning experiences, she wants to ensure that they will be ready for an educational future. In her situation, I feel her sense of power over the children is directly linked to the strong sense of responsibility she has for the welfare of these students. Bollnow (1964/88) recognized that adults do need to be responsible for children but that children must also feel a different sense of responsibility in order to make a relationship reciprocal. It is an interesting conundrum when placed against a backdrop of institutionalized responsibility

which presents a perception of the adult as solely accountable for children's learning.

This teacher is very ethical in her approach to the children, a fact I recognize and applaud even though I sense that there might be an alternative to the power structure that might make this relationship, and the learning that arises from it, more effective. But then again, perhaps there is no alternative possible given the specific experiences of this class during the past year. As she said,

> I'm learning a lot from these kids, probably more than I'm ever going to teach them. I do love them all and they each have a unique gift that they're giving me.

Wonderful words!

Grade One

Sharing power means sharing learning in this classroom. I sensed a comfort level in this classroom which implied that this teacher and the children were taking equal responsibility for learning and maintaining a relationship. Children felt free to ask questions and to steer conversations in a direction different than what the teacher had planned. The tulips are an excellent and clear example of this phenomenon. As well, there was a sense of community in the classroom, a sense of we're doing this together, an intangible, difficult to convey, but evident in each participant valuing the teacher and each other. These interview comments from children and their teacher on separate occasions provide a glimpse into this relationship. One child says,

> I really think...like having fun is important. Because everybody likes it, sometimes even the teachers like it.

Another child says, "Oh yeah, the teachers are important." and the teacher comments

that,

> We really enjoy each other, there's never a dull moment.... I really want kids to feel happy in school. If you feel happy, feel proud of what you do, enjoy what you do in school, I think that's a real accomplishment.

Children demonstrate caring for each other as well.

> Melanie is carefully tending to Ellen, whose knee hurts. She sits with Ellen in circle, leads and supports her to a position in the circle. She ties her shoes, rubs her knee gently and helps Ellen to lean against her, all the while making soothing noises and checking to see if she's okay. Meanwhile, the class is coming together for a story about Q Bear and the focus is on parts of their bodies. (May 14, 1996)

These examples illustrate a caring attitude that seems very strong in this class, the sign for me of a vibrant relationship in which teacher and children can demonstrate their understanding of how human society operates.

Interactions were always calm and reminders of expectations gentle but clear. The children and teacher practiced these expectations, talking them out to understand them. Largely, this is illustrated in the teacher's questions to them about what they should do. For example, she regularly used questions like, " What should you do?" "How will you know?" " Who can tell?" In this way, children have an equal responsibility for the management of class behaviour and can offer their own interpretation of appropriate

behaviour.

Children in this grade one class had not lost the desire to please the teacher, and the teacher had respect for them as contributors and as co-learners. There is a reciprocity evident in their relationships, in the compromises they make to accommodate each other. This is in contrast to the grade two class I observed; however, it must be noted that the routines in grade one had been operating for some time unlike the grade two class which was in the process of establishing relationships. Comparisons are indeed unfair and illogical. Based on the way of discussing issues in grade one, it would seem that children had helped to create the routines which ensured a secure environment. Strong routines gave children knowledge of what to expect and consistency. Yet, there were many examples where children could express their commitment to learning through choices -- in the math bins, through the choice of discussion topics, and in the decisions they made about curriculum/play on a daily basis.

> Another group is playing the "teacher game" with clocks. Kelly asks, "Do you have to be the teacher always?" Gina answers, "No, we're going to take turns." The "teacher" shows a clock with a time prearranged on its face and the girls tell what the time is and write it on the white board. (May 8, 1996)

It is evident that they constructed this game themselves since there were no specific rules set up in the math bin and since no other group has played it quite the same way. The development of "playing teacher" appears to me to be a compliment to their teacher as they model her actions. It is perhaps an indication that this relationship works well since

they want to emulate it.

It seems that the very nature of this adult-child relationship is the underlying base for the decisions about the learning that takes place in a shared approach to decision making about curriculum. Yet the teacher is careful to maintain the responsibility for creating trust and for caring for children in the relationship. This comes through in the teacher's participation and willingness to discuss what happens in the life beyond school or on the playground. She takes her responsibilities seriously but finds room for children to be partners in responsibilities such as the care of the physical environment, or decisions about topics; she follows their lead -- a sign that she respects the co in co-creator.

There were surprises for me within this lens of adult-child relationships. I am not surprised that an orientation to power is a significant element in the adult-child relationship. Society gives adults power over children rooted in our sense of responsibility for them and the care they require from us. In fact, responsibility or accountability in any role in society may mirror this (Adeodu, 1997). What surprises me is that power does not necessarily exclude the demonstration of an ethic of caring. In fact, the authority of an adult is often reinforced in these teachers through an incredible sense of responsibility for children. I have always thought that you could feel responsible for children without exercising power. Indeed I still think so, but I'm more open now to the possibility that includes authority motivated by a deep sense of responsibility. I am less inclined than I was to ascribe personal motivation for power in the relationship. I will puzzle over the issue of power for some time, I think, since it seems a direct challenge to cherished beliefs.

Perhaps the distinction is made in understanding the role of choice. To share power means providing real choice in learning, a difficult accomplishment given an age of increasingly tight restrictions in curriculum as prescribed by local and provincial, and now interprovincial authorities. Political expediency has meant that society, through the governments it elects, is demanding more accountability and more hard evidence as proof of learning. This results in a strict and static view of curriculum as a thing that can be learned rather than as a process which is part of the learner. The backlash will come when we acknowledge that learning is an intrinsic reaching out to make sense of the world and when we know how valuable choice is to learning and growing. Providing choice is a theme that reoccurs in much that I have previously written about curriculum and play. The onus is on adults to provide opportunity and on children to take advantage of the opportunities. In this way, we can see that reciprocity is the result of providing and accepting choice.

It hasn't been easy to demonstrate children as partners in these relationships since my adultomorphic gaze has only let me approach this from an adult perspective. Indeed, society expects more of adults who stand in a relationship with children than it does of the children as partners. We are afraid, I think, that if we delegate some of the responsibility to children, we will be seen as neglectful or abusive. So we guard against the possibilities of such labels and thereby eliminate the possibilities of children as more responsible partners. I doubt that we will ever see children as equals within the question of responsibility for the very reason that we can't escape being adults who have the responsibility for the care of children. I wonder though if we will be able to move towards the sharing of power that includes the possibility of reciprocity and trust of each

other in a dynamic relationship, the co as in co-creator of relationship, play and curriculum. Perhaps this is one way we could move children from their position of "other" in our society.

Gold is carried out of the depths of the mineshaft and processed into the bars that provide our society with its financial base. There is also gold in the relationships which support the richness of our learning and our living. From the depths of experience comes the understanding that a reciprocal relationship with children as learners is worth more than all the gold we can bring out of the mineshaft. We may have to dig deep and chip away a lot of what seems like useless ore but there are indeed seams of learning in our classrooms.

Epilogue
Thoughts of Gold

> To truly question something is to interrogate something from the heart of our existence, from the center of our being.... Is this not the meaning of research: to question something by going back again and again to the things themselves until that which is put to the question begins to reveal something of its essential nature? I can only genuinely ask the question of the nature of pedagogy if I am indeed animated by the question in the very life I live with children. (van Manen, 1990, p.43)

The researcher who insists upon discovering a single truth presents an illusion and does an injustice to the individual stories of the participants. The discussion in the previous chapters can be seen as a description of what it is like for children and the adults in their learning lives to be co-creators. I truly hope to have captured a sense of what is was like for them, but, in all honesty, I must admit you are still seeing them through my eyes. It can be no other way. What I present next will be some of the light I see sparkling and glinting off the gold; however, I cannot present these thoughts as a single truth. To suggest that the ideas that follow will be the most valuable part of this dissertation denies the many truths that lie in the examples I have previously described. What follows are my reflections -- thoughts that have intrigued me during the course of this process of observing, thinking, writing and rewriting. I am looking for closure but fear that the

Catherine Wheel continues to whirl and spread its cosmic energy throughout my future. Research lives beyond our present endeavours and nags us until we return again to its continuing saga.

As I reconsider my original framework for starting this research, I am more than ever struck by the cohesive nature of the frame and the interrelationships of play, curriculum and adult-child relationships. Much of what I have seen hangs together very firmly on these three strands, these seams of learning. I found the task of separating for discussion extremely difficult. Indeed, it seemed ludicrous to separate play and curriculum. I found at times that what I wanted to say about curriculum I had already said about play. And what I wanted to say about play surely would be more fitting for curriculum. When it came time to look at curriculum, I found it necessary to go deeper, a rather fitting approach, given my metaphor. In fact, the metaphor permitted a structure for looking at and understanding the gold -- the findings of the research. I present some concluding thoughts (for now at least) about what I have chipped out of the story on this leg of my research journey. Life in the tunnels has been exciting.

Responsibility

To think about co-creation or even creation without considering the attendant component of responsibility seems to be less than appropriate. Responsibility for one's act of creation seems vital. How can we create without also being connected to the thing, the "what" of creation? If, as I think, curriculum is a living organism, dynamic in its structure, then its ever changing, and constantly creative essence, requires our continual involvement. It also requires that we be responsible for its composition and maintenance. As learners and teachers we take responsibility for our learning and our own curriculum

just as the children exploring the tulips did and as all children in play do.

While I understand the larger goals of schooling as preparing children for life in society, I am worried that we place the development of curriculum outside the purvue of those who actually use it. As jurisdictions grow larger with the push to standardize curriculum across not only provinces but large regions, curriculum becomes less connected to the fabric of our everyday lives. Its generation seems beyond our control. I applaud the very worthy goal that lies behind the development of a more global curriculum. It is important to provide every child with opportunity, but I am concerned that a global curriculum must by its very nature become something to be measured rather than something in which to be truly engaged. In my ideal world, curriculum would be what happens day by day in the classroom and ways of representing learning would be recognized as the tools but not the end goal. Obviously the very nature of society demands a common communication system and an understanding of symbol systems -- mathematical, lingual, artistic -- but is it possible to see these as ways of helping children represent their thinking to others without losing that inner quest for learning about the world in which we live? I am concerned that because as adults we have a deep sense of responsibility for children, we are imposing a curriculum that is outside of their experience and beyond a relevant connection to their lives. We mandate the "what" without considering the "how." In this research, there have been many positive examples of the very real curriculum that children and adults create together in the classroom. I am exhilarated by this evidence of the possibilities of a dyadic teaching/learning relationship and by the reality of these "teachers' presence with children. This presence, if authentic, is being" (Aoki, 1992, p.21) and situates teachers as co-creators in the classroom. The

notion of presence, I think, recognizes a dyadic relationship which is embedded in the co aspect of co-creator, since to really be with another person moves the other from other into we.

Why is responsibility part of the act of creation? I have a sense that the whole picture includes the decisions that we make as part of the process as well as the initiation of the act. Creation implies for me a larger process than starting and includes the responsibility to carry through. Learning then goes beyond the surface and engages our whole being as we create our own learning activities. We become responsible as we create the content. We become responsible for the decisions we are making about what to prune, ignore, include, develop, organize, and process as we filter through our understanding. I do think that this is what happens in schools, even though it seems increasingly difficult to engage in creation when accountability becomes more external rather than being part of the reciprocity of a dyadic classroom relationship.

As responsibility becomes more closely tied to a mandated curriculum which has its origins in a goal to streamline and rationalize experience, the direction of accountability shifts. Instead of a direct and personal accountability between co-creators in a local sense, a standardization of learning implies a responsibility to others not in the classroom. While this demand for standardization and accountability springs from a desire to provide what is best for children, given a limited conception of the world in which we live, it is nevertheless dangerous. It denies the reality of our diversity which in the past has ensured the development of new ideas and new ways of living in the world. This is not to be confused with progress at all costs, but rather to be seen as the evolution of many possible combinations. This overriding sense of responsibility springs from the

burden of accountability we place on adults who are with children. Teachers of young children (any age, for that matter) are accountable to parents, administrators, governments and the larger community. There is a possibility that accountability goes too far if it is not first directed at the children we teach. The political climate of our times influences a focus on accountability for its own sake. Teachers and children in school settings bear the brunt of proving their worth to the world rather than being able to share the wonderful stories of their learning. No one should have to prove that learning is worthwhile. While I do not wish to demean this sense of responsibility to others for the lives of children, I do wish to point out that sometimes it gets in the way of the relationship at hand. Responsibility has another impact, especially on relationships.

Reciprocity

In this study, I had the luxury of observing many relationships. A relationship that is truly reciprocal may not be possible between adult and child. Our sense of responsibility interferes. I have commented on this previously and so won't re-examine this issue with great detail. However, it is important enough to mention again that this sense of responsibility denies children as learners the role they might take in directing and controlling some of their own learning. The result is that the richness of the possibilities is lost to both children and adult because we have no time to stop and study the tulips.

The question we must ask ourselves is, who is ultimately responsible for learning? In a lopsided relationship, the teacher may use power to control what is learned and how it is learned. The responsibility an adult assumes may spring from a sense of fear. The teacher may be afraid that children will not be ready for the next step. Of all the fears

associated with the sense of responsibility, I think this is the greatest. We forget that children live in the present while we as adults are always planning for the future. In a way we are saving for a rainy day, forgetting to enjoy the sunny ones we are experiencing now. What we must do is ask ourselves "who am I in the lives of children?" as Feeney, Christensen and Moravcik (1987) suggest when they say,

> We are convinced that the most important characteristic of a good teacher is the ability to be with children and not what one does to or for them. This means respecting the child as a person and being attentive to the individual and the relationship. (p. 390)

The teacher may also fear what other adults will say -- the teacher in the next grade, the principal, the parents, the administrators and so on. This fear seems irrational when set down here in black and white; however, the pressure of what others may think is a very real part of the anxiety teachers (and many adults) feel. Wherever the fear comes from, the sense of responsibility is very real. The result may be an exercise of power which fails to take the needs of children as learners into account. The teacher as the adult in the relationship seems to me to be the loser since the equation of power and control with responsibility puts the children across a boundary. The teacher is an outsider. The repercussions are enormous since the learning that is inside is beyond access. The teacher's learning becomes limited by narrow perceptions. It might be more appropriate to see the reciprocity in the relationship on a continuum, as children and teacher move closer together. I do not deny that adults need to accept responsibility for children. There is much we must do to ensure they become learners. Rather I want to suggest that

teachers and children can be within reach of each other in the satisfying context of a dyadic relationship. The adults in my study, for the most part, have shown this to be possible. The children have confirmed it as they engaged in the play that is the generation of curriculum in the classrooms across the four sites. They seem always willing to invite the adults into their world. I am excited and grateful to have seen many fine examples of teacher and children entering into dynamic learning relationships.

The Politics of Curriculum

I have already hinted at the political aspects of curriculum generation. We are witnessing a desperate attempt to ensure that all children have equal opportunities which is in itself a laudable goal. However, what is lost is the recognition of the child, the learner, as a unique individual. We cannot mandate the essence of learning and reproduce it in neatly packaged form. In an attempt to standardize, we lose the specific experience to gain a generalized format of learning.

And something is lost.

> It is difficult to maintain interest when the content of the lesson is prescribed in detail by someone outside the classroom who cannot see whether the students (or the teachers) are bored or confused, co-operative or resentful, "morning people" or "afternoon people," hungry, anxious, bruised, or angry. It is difficult to maintain interest when students are grouped together on the basis of ability, so that they cannot help each other, and when the scope of their activities is confined by the constraints of timetables and

the classroom walls. (Smith, 1990, p.128)

Such constraints, says Smith, may not promote thinking which I propose is the goal of education.

Sometimes decisions are made which place children and teachers in incredibly stressful situations. In Alberta, there have been examples of this in the recent past. The amount of standardized testing that seems to be increasing has a backlash on student achievement in the form of pressure. In grade two, the teacher is already worrying about whether children will be ready for grade three and the tests they must take. School aggregate test scores are released to the community with the result that schools and teachers are graded along with children. Parents worry that children will not be ready for life if they do not start writing exams in grade one. Workbooks appear in stores that are meant to prepare children for kindergarten and they are snapped up by anxious parents and preschool teachers. This search for a panacea to counteract the complications of our fear of uncertainty, leads us to look for essentials (Greene, 1978) and "mystifications afflict [us]; [we] give up hope of truly understanding. [We] seek out panaceas wherever [we] can find them. [We] need above all things to believe" (p.74). Such pressure that arises from these attitudes dominates the school experience and limits the joyous dynamic curriculum that could evolve. The stories I have relayed are proof that it is possible, but how often and for how long will it be possible, given this type of intense pressure.

Another example of the political effect on curriculum has been the severe financial reductions that occurred, especially at the kindergarten level and just lately in daycare. The morale of teachers has plummeted (LaGrange, Everett-Turner & Sharpe, 1995) and it is hard to be effective in the classroom if one worries about how everything

will be accomplished in less time and with fewer resources. Sooner or later, children will begin to feel the effects of the dwindling capital of a successful school system and early childhood programs. I have been very privileged to witness the success of learning in these four sites, but we need to ensure that these wonderful stories can continue.

Celebrating

Now that I have confided all my worries, I wish to celebrate the joys of this research. Eleanor Duckworth writes of the "having of wonderful ideas" in her book of the same name. While she is writing largely from a Piagetian perspective focused on cognitive development, her notion of wonderful ideas resonates in the stories I have presented. As I think back to my original questions for this research, I feel confident that I have been able to describe in small ways what it is like for children to be co-creators of curriculum. Of course, since I see their play through my adult eyes, I can only give an adult view of what it is like for them. I had hoped to present their voices a little more strongly but the children's actions within their play do provide some sense of their experience. Play is the language of young children. It is how they represent the world they see around them and how they make sense of the new as they combine the present and the past. This supports a Piagetian model of assimilation and accommodation. Indeed, researchers have speculated about the relationship between play and language for some time. Children develop "communicative competence" (Sachs, Goldman & Chaille, 1985, p. 55) which is supported through play interactions. Play is also a base upon which children build their knowledge of text (Wolf & Pusch, 1985) and their ability to engage in literary activity. As I think further about play as communication and representation, my conviction is that children show us what they are thinking through the play they share

with us. This is their way of communicating an inner view of the world. What they think is visible in what they do, and we, as the adult onlookers, must watch and listen. We need to ask ourselves what it is children are saying about how they view the world as we observe their inner view as expressed in play. Play is the language they use, whether or not an actual script or narrative is evident. It is easier to touch children's realities if an actual script is in use, but even very young children can tell us about their understanding of their world without narrative play.

The children in all four sites had wonderful ideas which were often like scripts for learning. I learned much from them as we built in the blocks in kindergarten, gassed up cars on the playground and poured sand in daycare, and played bank teller and teacher in grade one. In grade two, I was fascinated by the play within the work as children created codes and made a space for play in their routines. As I write this, I am awed by their creativity and problem solving abilities. I am amazed at the ability to learn about the world just because it's there and not because it's mandated. I am overwhelmed by the generous spirit that invites me into play and treats me like an equal. I am grateful for the opportunity to see children immersed in learning even though it's not always in the program of studies or part of the adult's agenda. I am filled with hope that despite all my concerns and worries about the trends in curriculum development, children are still learners because they want to be players and because they must be.

> Play informs, nourishes and heals, like the protoplasm of life beginning to quicken within tree buds in March. Play comes with the gift of life and is a response to the source within each of us that seeks to join with life's wisdom.

(Donaldson, 1993, p. 137)

Play is still fashionable for children and they use it as a vehicle to stretch themselves and the adults in their lives to new heights in learning. Play changes as children grow older. The toddlers are very functional and gradually move to the symbolic world. Preschoolers and kindergarten children consolidate and refine this sense of the symbolic in socio-dramatic play. As children enter elementary school, play becomes part of the seams and becomes more introspective during the time when they have less control over what is happening. It is still play but it seems to be deeper and less accessible to adults. Perhaps this is part of the privacy and secrecy that children seek as they separate themselves from the adult world. Or perhaps we control the child's access to the adult world through secrecy (van Manen & Levering, 1996) and, in doing so, lose our access to their world. Regardless of the origin of this secrecy, children need to be granted freedom in their learning through their play. Greene encapsulates this for me as she says,

> Students must be enabled, at whatever stages they find themselves to be, to encounter curriculum as a possibility. By that I mean curriculum ought to provide a series of occasions for individuals to articulate the themes of their existence and to reflect on those themes until they know themselves to be in the world and can name what has been up to then obscure. If this is to happen, disciplinary opportunities of many kinds must be provided, the subject matters embodying the schemata used in our tradition to make sense of things. As students are enabled consciously

> (and critically) to order their experiences by means of such schemata, they ought to be left free to look out upon their own landscapes, or what may be thought of as their own perceptual ground. (Greene, 1978, p.18-19)

I believe that children can be free when they co-create curriculum through their play.

I would be remiss if I did not also comment on the truly caring and committed adults that were so generous in sharing their classroom life with children. They have taught me much about coping in stressful situations and that the most important part of their work is the relationship they have with the children.

> A tactful educator realizes that it is not the child but the teacher who has to cross the street in order to go to the child's side. The teacher has to know "where the child is," "how the child sees things," how it is that this student has difficulty crossing the street to enter the domains of learning (van Manen, 1991, p.155).

While I lament for their future, these tactful educators are quietly standing "beside" the children and becoming co-creators of curriculum with them. And that's the gold in this research -- children and teachers creating a classroom life embedded in a curriculum that grows as they wonder about volcanoes, tulips, the giant's child, robot horses, and all the other wonderful things they are learning. I have been given a gift of hope and have seen truly empowered learning.

This doesn't feel like the end. I can see the Catherine Wheel spinning anew and I welcome the ever-changing scenery as I leave these golden seams of learning in search of new horizons, new landscapes of learning.

References:

Adeodu, R. (1997). Teachers' understandings of educating in culturally diverse contexts. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Almy, M., Monighan, P., Scales, B., & Van Hoorn, J. (1984). Recent research on play: The teacher's perspective in L. Katz (ed.) Current topics in early childhood education, volume V. Norwood: Ablex. p. 1-22.

Almy, M. (1984). A child's right to play. Young Children, May.

Am, E. (1985). Play in the preschool: Some aspects of the role of the adult. International Journal of Early Childhood, 17 (2) p.91-97.

Aoki, T. (1992) Layered voices of teaching: The uncannily correct and the elusively true in Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text, W. Pinar and W. Reynolds (eds).New York: Teachers College Press.

Ashton-Warner, S. (1963) Teacher. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

Beck, H. (1973). Don't push me I'm no computer. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Berk, L. & Winsler, A. (1995). Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and

early childhood education. Washington, D.C. : NAEYC.

Bogdan, R. & Biklan, S. (1982). Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods (2nd ed.) Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Black, M. (1979). More about metaphor in A. Ortony (ed.) Metaphor and Thought. London: Cambridge University Press.

Bollnow, O. (1964/88). The pedagogical atmosphere. Phenomenology and Pedagogy 6 (3) (translated by M. van Manen).

Bredekamp, S. & Copple, L. (1997). Developmentally appropriate practice. Washington, D.C. : NAEYC.

Brown, S. (1993). Playing on the path to literacy. Unpublished master's thesis. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Bullough, R. (1992). Beginning teacher curriculum decision making, personal teaching metaphors and teacher education. Teaching and Teacher Education, 8 (3) p.239-252.

Cherry, C. (1976). Creative play for the developing child. California: David S. Lake.

Christie, J. & Wardle, F. (1992). How much time is needed for play? Young Children. March, p.28-32.

Christie, J, (1991). Play programs at the preschool and elementary level. Paper presented at the Second International Amsterdam Play symposium. April.

Clark, K. (1989). Moments of vision. New York: Harper and Row.

Connelly, F. & Clandinin, D. (1988). Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience. New York: Teachers College Press.

Craig, G., Kermis, M. R & Digdon, N. (1998). Children today. Scarborough: Prentice Hall.

Csikszentimihalyi, M. (1981). Some paradoxes in the definition of play in A. Cheska (ed) Play as context. West Point, N.Y. : Leisure Press.

Das, V. (1989). Voices of children. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 118 (4). p.263-294.

Davies, B. (1982). Life in the classroom and playground: The accounts of primary school children. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

DeVries, R. & Kohlberg, L. (1987). Constructivist early education: Overview and comparison with other programs. Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

Doll, W. (1990). Book review. Teachers College Record.

Donaldson, F. (1993). The vision and practice of belonging: Playing by heart. Deerfield Beach, Florida: Health Communications Inc.

Duckworth, E. (1996). The having of wonderful ideas. New York: Teachers College Press.

Eisner, E. (1991). The enlightened eye. New York: MacMillan.

Elkind, D. (1987). Miseducation: Preschoolers at risk. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.

Erikson, E. (1963). Childhood and society. (2nd edition) New York: Norton.

Feeney, S., Christensen, D. & Moravcik, E. (1987). Who am I in the lives of children?: An introduction to teaching young children (third edition) Columbus: Merrill.

Fish, S. (1980). Is there a text in this class? The authority of interpretive communities. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Frost, J. & Klein, B. (1979). Children's play and playgrounds. Toronto: Allyn and Bacon.

Gadamer, H. (1994). Truth and method. (second revised edition) New York: Continuum.

Gadamer, H. (1984). Truth and method. New York: Crossroad.

Gallagher, S. (1992). Hermeneutics and education. New York: State University of New York Press.

Grumet, M. (1988). Bitter milk: Women and Teaching. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Greene, M. (1978). Landscapes of Learning. New York: Teachers College Press.

Henderson, J. (1992). Curriculum discourse and the question of empowerment. Theory into Practice, 31 (3) p. 204-209.

Jackson, P. (1992). Conceptions of curriculum and curriculum specialists in P. Jackson (ed.) Handbook of research on curriculum: A project of the American Educational Research Association p 3-40. New York: MacMillan.

Johnson, J., Chistie, J. & Yawkey, T. (1987). Play and Early Childhood Development. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company.

Jones, E. & Nimmo, J. (1994). Emergent curriculum. Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

Jones, E. (1989). Inviting children into the fun: Providing enough activity choices outdoors. Child Care Exchange, December.

Katz, L. & McLellan, D. (1997). Fostering children's social competence: The teacher's role. Washington, D.C. : NAEYC.

Katz, L. (1985). Research currents: Teachers as learners. Language Arts, 62 (7) p. 778-782.

King, E. , Chipman, M. & Cruz-Janzen, M. (1994). Educating young children in a diverse society. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

King, N, (1983). Lessons in the emaning of leisure: understanding the work/play dichotomy. Occasional paper No. 26, University of Alberta, Secondary Education.

Klein, E., Kantor, R. & Fernie, D. (1988). What do young children know about school? Young Children, July, p.32-39.

Klein, F. (1985). The master teacher as curriculum leader. The Elementary School Journal, 86 (1) p. 35-43.

LaGrange, A. , Everett Turner, L. & Sharpe, A. (1995). Teachers' perspectives on changes in ECS funding. Early Childhood Education, 28 (1) 48-51.

Langer, S. (1957). Problems of Art. New York: MacMillan.

Leve, R. (1980). Childhood: The study of development. New York: Random House.

Levinas, E. (1985). Ethics and infinity (trans. Richard A. Cohen). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Linge, D. (1977). (ed) Philosophical hermeneutics: Hans Georg Gadamer. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Marshall, J., Streedain, R. & Zavagno, P. (1992). Curriculum theorizing: Stories from the ground up. Theory into Practice, 31 (3), p.264-269.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1960). Eye and Mind in J. Edie(ed.) The Primacy of Perception. Northwestern University Press.

Misgeld, D. & Jardine, D. (1989). Hermeneutics as the undisciplined child: Hermeneutic and technical images of education in M.J. Packer & R.B. Addison (eds) Entering the circle: Hermeneutic investigations in psychology, p.259-273. Albany: SUNY Press.

Monighan-Nourot, P., Scales, B., Van Hoorn, J. & Almy, M. (1987). Looking at children's play: A bridge between theory and practice. New York: Teachers College Press.

Nandy, A. (1987). Traditions, tyranny and utopias. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Noddings,N. (1988). An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. American Journal of Education, February.

Paley, V. (1986). On listening to what children say. Harvard Educational Review, 56 (2) p. 122-131.

Postman, N. (1994). The disappearance of childhood. New York: Random House.

Rankin, B. (1997). Education as collaboration: Learning from and building on Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget in J. Hendrick (ed.) First steps toward teaching the Reggio way. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Reynolds, E. (1996). Guiding young children: A child centered approach. second edition. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Reynolds, G. & Jones, E. (1997). Master players: Learning from children at play. New York: Teachers College Press.

Reynolds, K. (1990). Curriculum in a new weave. Unpublished master's thesis. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Rinaldi, C.(1993). The emergent curriculum and social constructivism in C. Edwards, L. Gandini & G. Forman (eds) The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Norwood, N.J. : Ablex.

Rogers, C. & Sawyers, J. (1988). Play in the lives of children. Washington: NAEYC.

Sachs, J. , Goldman, J., & Chaille, C. (1985). Narratives in preschoolers' socio-dramatic play: The role of knowledge and communicative competence in L. Galda & A. Pellegrini (eds) Play, language, and stories: The development of children's literate behaviour. Norwood, N.J. : Ablex.

Schickedanz, J., Schickedanz, D., Forsyth, P. & Forsyth, G. (1998).

Understanding children and adolescents third edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Smith, D. (1994). Pedagon. Bragg Creek: Mayko Press.

Smith, D. (1983). The meaning of children in the lives of adults: A hermeneutic study. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Edmonton: University of Alberta.

Smith, F. (1990) To think. New York: Teacher College Press.

Spradley, J. (1980). Participant observation. Fort Worth: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.

Strom, R. (1981). Growing through play: Readings for parents & teachers. Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Vaage, C. (1997). Presentation made to Ed El 558 summer class on the teacher's role in play. July.

van Manen, M. & Levering, B. (1996). Childhood's secrets: Intimacy, privacy, and the self reconsidered. New York: Teachers College Press.

van Manen, M. (1991) The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness. London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

van Manen, M. (1990) Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London, Ontario: Althouse Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in society. edited by M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman) Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Waksler, F. (1996). The little trials of childhood and children's strategies for dealing with them. London: Falmer Press.

Wasserman, S. (1990). Serious players in the primary classroom: Empowering children through active learning experiences. New York: Teachers College Press.

Wilson, L. (1986). Infants & toddlers: Curriculum and teaching. Albany, New York: Delmar Publishers Inc.

Wolf, D. & Pusch, J. (1985). The origins of autonomous texts in play boundaries in L. Galda & A. Pellegrini (eds) Play, language, and stories: The development of children's literate behaviour. Norwood, N.J. : Ablex

Zeuli, J. & Buchmann, M. (1988). Implementation of teacher thinking research as curriculum deliberation. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 20 (2) p.141-154.